PATTERNS OF POWER · AHMAD SHAH DURRANI

Ahmad Shah Durrani and the Durrani Empire

The Complete Study · 1747 — 1765 — 1793

Thomas J. Bryan

with Claude (Anthropic) · 1747–1793

held as tested, not revealed

Held as tested, not revealed.

A case study in the Patterns of Power series.
Primary sources quoted exactly; modern scholarship paraphrased and credited.
Contested figures given as ranges. Nothing reconstructed from memory.

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Preface and Outline

Front matter — how this study was made, the disciplines it holds itself to, the correction it owes the collection, and a map of its thirteen parts

The collaboration

This is a case study in the *Patterns of Power* series, applying the series' framework to the Durrani empire, from the murder of Nadir Shah at Fathabad on the night of 19–20 June 1747 to the death of Timur Shah in May 1793 and the fratricidal wars that finished the dynasty. The framework is a lens for reading how any order of power is founded, dressed and held: the floor of force beneath every order; the robe of doctrine laid over the floor to make the force cheap; the settlement that divides the spoils among the armed; the cost column in which each subject prices defection; the formation that installs, in childhood, who a person's leaders are and what he may not question; the seam through which a population's knowledge must pass; the default by which an elite coordinates without instruction; and beneath all of it position logic, the proposition that a person decides from where he stands, by what he values against what he can be made to pay, within the field of the visible his position happens to draw for him.

Ahmad Shah Durrani was chosen for a specific reason and it is worth being blunt about it. The collection had already used him — twice — as an answer. He appears in the Afsharid study as the control case for Nadir Shah, and again in the comparative work on what allows a coalition of armed men to settle, on the strength of a nine-day assembly at Kandahar in 1747 at which a young man was said to have declined to campaign for himself and to have been named by a religious figure at real risk of not being chosen. He had been doing argumentative work in two documents before anyone examined him properly, which is exactly the condition in which a study goes wrong.

So this study was commissioned as a cross-examination of the collection's own evidence, with the instruction that if the research showed the earlier reading to be overstated, that finding would be more valuable than a confirmation and must be said plainly.

It was overstated, and the study says so in its landscape and again in its first and last modules. The nine days and the silence are not in any eighteenth-century source. They

enter the literature in a nationalist biography published at Kabul in 1943, pass into the standard school textbook of 1949, and reach English by way of nineteenth-century European reconstructions of Persian chronicles behind which stands the history of the dynasty that overthrew Ahmad Shah's own line. What the contemporary court chronicle actually records is an assembly of khans imploring a reluctant claimant to take a throne described as his by inheritance, a wandering dervish fixing a tuft of green grass to his turban — and, within months, an intercepted treasury convoy, largesse distributed to buy a faction, a rival killed on the road, and two chiefs trampled to death by elephants.

The comparison with Nadir survives. It survives restated on three axes rather than one, and in a form the study argues is stronger than the version it replaces.

The study was built the way the series is built, one module at a time. The author brought the framework, the direction, the corrections when the model had a concept wrong, and the judgement of the whole; Claude, Anthropic's model, did the research — verifying every load-bearing quotation, date and figure by search against a source reproducing the primary text before any module was written — and produced the drafts, each presented and confirmed before the next was begun. The framework's concepts are the series'; the Durrani application, and the refinements it yielded, are the work of the collaboration.

The method

The engine throughout is the method of information asymmetry, adapted to an order with no metropole and therefore no distant public to be kept ignorant.

That absence is itself a finding, and it shapes how the study reads its sources. A conquering power answerable to a home audience must keep what its floor does away from the people whose money and sons it runs on, and the whole apparatus of the laundered despatch follows. Ahmad Shah had no such audience. The people whose belief he needed were present at the executions and approved of them. His commissioned court historian accordingly sets down a killing by elephant and a quarter-century of the founder's own tribe conspiring against him without any apparent embarrassment — which produces a better archive, and a caution: candour in a source may indicate not honesty but the absence of anyone who needed to be lied to.

So the gap this study works in runs elsewhere. It runs between the coin, which claims a command direct from God with no caliph and no emperor in the chain, and the revenue list, which shows the capital province yielding a fiftieth of the empire's income. It runs between the court chronicle's account of the accession, in which kingship is an inheritance, and the same chronicler's answer to the grand wazir

seventeen years later, in which nobody has ever taken kingship by inheritance. It runs between a British envoy's report that few communities attend more to the wishes and opinions of the governed and a Kashmiri peasant coming before a governor with a plough held over his head and a petition tied to the top of it. And it runs between a handful of grass laid on a robber's turban in 1747 and a king telling an assembly in 1924 that the crown of wheat this nation bestowed upon our dynasty makes his descendants proud.

The study sets the exact words beside the exact words, lays out the arithmetic, and leaves the sum to the reader. It does not preach the conclusion.

The disciplines

Five rules govern every module.

Quotation. Public-domain primary sources are quoted exactly and at the length the argument needs — Mountstuart Elphinstone's *An Account of the Kingdom of Caubul* of 1815, Henry Raverty's *Selections from the Poetry of the Afghans* of 1862 for Ahmad Shah's own verse, the couplet struck on his coinage, and the Persian terms as they stand in the eighteenth-century chronicles. Modern copyrighted scholarship is paraphrased briefly and credited. Where an eighteenth-century Persian text reaches the reader only through a modern edition or translation — as most of the *Tarikh-i Ahmad Shahi* does — it is described or paraphrased rather than quoted at length, and that is said.

No fabrication. No quotation, date, attribution or figure is invented or reconstructed from memory. This case required the rule constantly, because the most quotable things about Ahmad Shah are the least attested. The nine-day deliberation is withdrawn. The verse in which he prefers the summits of the Afghan mountains to the throne of Delhi — the single most quoted line attributed to him — does not appear in the earliest published selection from his *divan* and could not be traced to any eighteenth-century text; it is flagged and not used. The off-centre cenotaph sometimes offered as evidence for the Cloak dispute could not be verified and was replaced with better evidence that could. The name of the Bukharan ruler who surrendered the Cloak is given three ways in the literature and none is relied on. Casualty figures at Panipat, at Kup Rahira and in the Afghan civil wars are given as ranges with their provenance and their partisanship stated.

Gravity without partisanship. Suffering is held with gravity and the study refuses both flattery and demonisation. Its watchword is *legibility is not pardon*: to explain why the destruction of a shrine was a coherent theory of how to break a rival order is not to approve of it, and the observation that a massacre was formatively productive for the people it was inflicted on must never function as consolation. Equally, naming a

conquered origin is not debunking. A built thing that became real is more durable than a lie, and the men who believed in the Durrani settlement thirty years after it was written in a register were neither lying nor deceived.

Contribution. Every module returns a refinement to the framework, stated plainly in its closing section, rather than merely applying the framework to the case. Where a module confirms an earlier finding rather than producing a new one, it says so, and the findings compound rather than resetting.

Held as tested, not revealed. The pattern is treated as something discovered and tested against the evidence, not handed down — a lens laid over the record, a tendency and never a law.

What this case contributes

The study's single contribution is a configuration it calls the **export-funded settlement**, assembled across twelve modules as a chain in which each link is forced by the one before.

The population that supplies the floor is armed and mobile and can disperse, so the floor cannot price its defection. The apex must therefore *buy* its compliance rather than compel it. The purchase must therefore be funded from a population that *can* be compelled — irrigators who cannot carry their channels away, and provinces beyond the frontier. The order must therefore raid, whatever its ruler intends, because the gap between its establishment charge and its domestic revenue is too large to close at any tax rate: two lakhs a year from Kandahar against a Durrani cavalry salary bill many times that is a state that must raid, and nine invasions in twenty-two years is not nine decisions but a payment schedule. The raid then does four jobs at once — paying the subsidies, absorbing the surplus claimants, occupying the coordinating class, and renewing a warrant that can only be evidenced by victory — so that four solutions to the open problem come to rest on one outlet. But an order that raids a province without governing it *incubates its successor there*, because the unmet demand for protection creates a market, the withheld formation leaves the field, and the violence used to suppress the result becomes the material the result is made of. And when the successor matures the outlet closes and all four solutions fail at once; the interval before the visible collapse is the order's residual life on accumulated capital, here about a generation.

The configuration is diagnosable from a balance sheet: an order whose capital province cannot pay its own garrison is an export-funded settlement whatever it calls itself, and the early tell is not a rebellion but a protection market.

Nine further refinements compounded along the way and are set down in the closing module for the next case to test: that a conqueror inherits his sightlines with the apparatus he captures, and is destroyed by what grew in its blind spots; that the layer of prior conquest which looks most primordial may be the one whose construction is best documented; that the default question must be asked twice, once of the arrangement and once of the occupant, because an order can be extremely stable and its rulers extremely disposable; that a settlement can be non-heritable in its instrument and heritable in its silences; that an anchor can be acquired without being captured, because the object transfers and the interpretive authority does not; that force applied to a formation is an input rather than a solvent; that the sovereign's product must be priced and not only his demand; that the raid is a third extraction mode beside the rate and the dispossession; that an immunity is not a channel, and factional bargaining reliably produces the first and never the second; and that a founding narrative belongs to whoever held the presses two centuries later, who is characteristically not the founder's heirs.

The arc

A landscape opening and twelve modules, each with a framework function and its own title.

Landscape — the board in June 1747. The Established Abode. Kandahar under its rhyming Persian epithet, *dar al-qarar*, the Settled Place: a citadel that changed hands about ten times between 1522 and 1738, four layers of prior conquest reaching the self-running pole at very different depths, and what a harem guard at the perimeter of a murdered king's camp could and could not see of the rest of the board.

1 — The Floor of Force. The Treasure That Never Reached Kalat. Eight weeks between a murder in Khorasan and a wheat sheaf laid on a turban: a fighting retreat, an intercepted treasury convoy bound for the fortress where Nadir's own plunder still sat untouched, largesse distributed to buy a faction, and the elephants.

2 — The Settlement. A Horseman for Every Plough. Land held free of revenue in exchange for armed service, in a recognition fiction that called a grant a restoration — and the discovery that the grantee's default runs to the dispensation and not to the occupant.

3 — The Robe. From the Fish to the Moon. A coin claiming a command direct from the Peerless Almighty with no intermediary in the chain, a Sufi king's own mystical verse, and an imported relic that was to lie under his dome and never did.

4 — Formation. Singh Is Their Title. Four systems already installing a world in the children of Kandahar; the one the king did not build and could not override; and the counter-formation his own army spent twenty years supplying with martyrs.

5 — The Cost Column. One-Fifth, Twice a Year. Six ledgers running in opposite directions, and the province where the sovereign's own army was the principal danger and a competitor appeared offering the thing a state is supposed to sell.

6 — Extraction. Two Lakhs from Kandahar. A province-by-province revenue list in which the capital yields a fiftieth of the total and Kashmir twelve times what the capital does; the accounts kept in an Indian currency; and what survives of the comparison with Nadir once the arithmetic is on the page.

7 — Information and Suppression. A Scribe to Match Astarabadi. A king who sent abroad for a historian as good as his predecessor's, a tribal name deleted from the archive, no censorship apparatus at all — and the four incompatible memories the reign left behind.

8 — Elite Coordination and the Default. Whoever Is Fit. A grand wazir who claimed the throne in verse and was reinstated four years later; a court chronicle forced to repudiate the doctrine that seated its own patron; and the outlet that closed seven years before the founder died.

9 — Plurality or Foreclosure. The Wishes and Opinions of the Governed. A real bundle of enforceable immunities held by one confederacy, a Shi'a minority granted religious autonomy because the crown needed a counterweight, a body of clerics that told a king no and made it stick — and no institution anywhere through which any of it could be contested except by war.

10 — Change and Collapse. Twenty-Four Sons. The crack at the top with a number attached; and the rival that took the revenue base, which was not a peasantry rising but a hierarchy the extraction itself had incubated.

11 — The Grim Accounting. A Crown Made of a Cluster of Wheat. What the sword took, where the metabolic note was called and where it was not, what the order genuinely built — and how long it took for a handful of grass laid on a robber's turban to become a nation's bestowal.

12 — Convergence and Divergence. Two Answers to One Night. The control case restated, the same instrument compared where it produced the opposite result, and the strongest argument against everything in the study, given at full strength and answered.

A note on the periodisation

The study runs 1747 to 1793, from the accession at Nadirabad to the death of Timur Shah, with the collapse to 1823 treated in the change module rather than given its own arc.

The middle date on the title page is 1765, and it is the study's own finding rather than a conventional marker. That is the year the Bhangi *sardars* took Lahore, completing the loss of the province that was simultaneously the empire's revenue, its outlet for surplus claimants, its occupation for the coordinating class, and the continuous supply of victories a warrant claiming direct divine mandate required as evidence. The founder was alive, was still winning battles, and had seven years to live. The order is conventionally dated from his death in 1772 or from the fratricide after 1793. Both are too late by a generation, and the argument for 1765 is set out in the eighth and tenth modules.

LANDSCAPE

The Established Abode

The board on the night of 19–20 June 1747 — a province conquered ten times in two centuries, a tribal order that was itself another empire's administrative grant, and what a harem guard standing at the edge of a murdered king's camp could and could not see

The position, before the man

Somewhere between three and four thousand Afghan soldiers were camped below the royal tent at Fathabad, near Khabushan in Khorasan, on the night of 11 Jumada II 1160 — 20 June 1747 by the Gregorian reckoning — when a party of Qizilbash officers walked past the sentries and killed Nadir Shah in his bed. The lower figure comes from Imam al-Din Husayni; the higher from Père Louis Bazin, Nadir's own physician, who was at court that night and wrote an account of it. Among those Afghans, holding a middling rank and no independent command, was Ahmad Khan, son of Muhammad Zaman Khan Sadozai of the Abdali.

It is worth being exact about what he was, because almost everything written about him afterwards inflated it, and the inflation obscures the only thing that makes his subsequent career legible. He was not the commander of the Afghan contingent. That post belonged to Nur Muhammad Khan Alizai, whom Nadir had raised to it and who was at that moment at Kandahar preparing to escort the royal treasure to the fortress at Kalat. Ahmad Khan had not, on the best evidence, ridden with Nadir to Delhi in 1739; the sources that place him there are later ones with an obvious motive, since a Durrani king who had seen the sack of Delhi as a young man makes a tidier precedent for nine Durrani invasions of India than a king who had not. What the earliest sources give him is a rank of about a *ming bashi*, commander of a thousand, and a post as *suhbat-yasawul* — an aide-de-camp attending the ruler's person — and on this last campaign, a place among the guards of the royal harem. Before that he had spent seven years, from roughly the age of nine or eleven, as a hostage of the Ghilzai at Kandahar, and the nine years after 1738 as a supervised dependant of Nadir, resettled first to Mazandaran with a stipend.

None of this was accident, and Ahmad Shah's own court historian says so in as many words. Mahmud al-Husayni, writing at Kandahar a few years later under royal commission, sets down Nadir's *dastur* — his standing rule of thumb — for handling tribal aristocracies: men whose families had traditionally held standing were to be given

posts empty of honour, and men of no standing at all were to be honoured and elevated, so that they would always know their consequence issued from Nadir's own *dawlat* and would never, in the chronicler's phrase, lift their heads from the collar of servitude. He then names the men on whom the rule was worked in Kandahar. Abd al-Ghani Alakozai and Nur Muhammad Alizai, of no great lineage, were promoted to command and given the province's most productive land as tax-free *tiyul* against military service. Ahmad Khan and his relatives, of the first Abdali family, were watched.

So the position from which this study begins is a specific and rather narrow one: a high-born man deliberately kept low, standing inside the apex of the most effective military machine in Asia and holding no part of it, close enough to the ruler to guard his household and far enough from command to be safe. It is a position that shows a man a great deal about how an order works and gives him no stake in its working — which is, in the ordinary run of things, the worst combination available to whoever is running the order, and the reason it was such a poor policy will occupy a later part of this study. What matters here is the corollary the framework insists on and hindsight makes easy to forget: a position draws a man's field of the visible before it hands him a menu of options, and the edge of that field feels, from inside, like the edge of the world. Ahmad Khan on that night could see certain things with the clarity of a man who has stood beside them for nine years, and there were other things on the board — things that would ultimately destroy the empire he was about to found — that his position had never once given him a reason to look at.

This landscape is an inventory of both. It reconstructs the ground as it actually stood in the summer of 1747, and then asks, of each feature, whether it was inside the field a man in that position had been shown.

The Established Abode

In the Persian chronicles Kandahar carries a rhyming epithet: *dar al-qarar*, the Established Abode, the Settled Place. Mahmud al-Husayni uses it of the country the Durrani had summered and wintered in since ancient times. It is one of the great ironies of the region's documentary record, because in the two centuries before Ahmad Khan rode home to it, the citadel of Kandahar had changed hands roughly ten times.

The reason is geography, and the geography is worth holding, because it explains both the wealth of the province and the impossibility of anyone keeping it. Kandahar sits where the routes cross. Northern India — the Punjab and Sind, and beyond them Multan and Lahore — connects to Iran through Sistan and Herat, and to Central Asia through Herat and Kabul, and all of those roads meet in the Kandahar plain, watered by the Arghandab and the Helmand and by the underground channels that make

cultivation possible in a country of very little rain. What passed along those roads was worth taxing: horses above all, moving south and east from the Central Asian and Iranian breeding grounds toward an Indian market that consumed cavalry mounts faster than the subcontinent could produce them, along with camels, dried fruit, and the rarities of Khurasan, against textiles and precious goods moving the other way. The Mughals treated the province as the western frontier of their empire; the Safavids, on one contemporary formulation, treated it as the key to Hindustan. Both were right, and so both spent a century and a half fighting over a fortress that decades of that fighting had made one of the strongest in Asia.

Babur took Kandahar from the Arghunids, former Timurid vassals, in 1522. The Safavids held it briefly in 1537–38 and again in 1545; the Mughals until Shah Tahmasp I's men took the citadel in 1558; the Safavids for nearly four decades under Tahmasp's nephew and his sons, until those princes defected and Akbar's commander Shah Beg Khan came in for the Mughals in 1595; Shah Abbas I in 1622; the Mughals again in 1638, when the Safavid governor Ali Mardan Khan, about to be arrested by a grand wazir who found him too rich and too independent, simply handed the place to Shah Jahan and took an imperial rank and estates in Kashmir and Lahore in exchange; Shah Abbas II in 1649, after which three successive Mughal expeditions in 1651, 1652 and 1653 failed to get it back at great cost. The Safavids then held it for sixty years until a local Afghan revolt in 1709, and the Ghilzai held it for twenty-nine until Nadir took it in March 1738.

That is the ordinary condition of the ground: not a settled abode but a contested march, whose local men had spent two centuries being recruited, paid, promoted, dispossessed and hanged by two empires in turn. Nadir's conquest in 1738 added one further and highly visible act. He ordered the citadel of Kandahar destroyed — what remained of it became known simply as *shahr-i kuhna*, the Old City — and built a new provincial capital a short distance away, at a garden called Surkha Sher, which he had fortified and populated in the course of the siege and named Nadirabad. The site had a shrine on it, the tomb of an obscure local holy man called Sher-i Surkh Baba. In the summer of 1747 the assembly of Abdali khans that would proclaim Ahmad Khan king met at that shrine, inside that fort. The founding scene of the Durrani state took place on ground the last conqueror had cleared and built nine years earlier, at a saint's grave he had happened to enclose.

Four conquests deep

The framework's instruction here is not decorative and it is not a debunking device. A conqueror never meets an aboriginal order; he meets an earlier build that took. The

point of tracing the layers is not to show that the thing Ahmad Khan found was fake — it was the opposite of fake, it was the most real thing in the lives of everyone in the province — but to see precisely which of its features were old enough to run on conviction alone, and which were recent enough that the men living inside them still remembered who had made them and could imagine them being made differently. That distinction predicts a great deal about what a conqueror can cheaply use and what he will have to fight.

In Kandahar in 1747 the layers ran at least four deep, and they had taken to very different depths.

Islam, and the depth of the oldest layer. The Arab armies reached Sistan in the 650s and used it as a base for campaigns eastward, but the country between Ghazni and Kandahar did not fall easily or soon. The Zunbils of Zabulistan and the Kabulshahs held out against caliphal armies for something close to two centuries, sustained by a solar cult and by terrain that rewarded defence, until Ya'qub b. al-Layth al-Saffar's campaigns out of Sistan broke their independence around 870. Even that did not convert the countryside; the region was drawn properly into the world of Islam under the Ghaznavids in the tenth and eleventh centuries, and rural conversion in the highlands ran later still. Set beside 1747, this means that Islam in Kandahar was between seven and eight hundred years old as an established order — older than the Mughal empire and the Safavid empire put together, older than the Pashto literary tradition, older than any lineage's memory of anything.

At that depth a built order is not a belief people hold; it is the medium in which they hold beliefs. Nobody in Kandahar in 1747 experienced the Hanafi law, the hijri calendar, the Friday sermon or the pilgrimage to Baba Wali's shrine on the Arghandab as an imposition, any more than they experienced the seasons that way. That the order had an origin in conquest is a historical fact and not a psychological one: the Zunbils were as far from a Kandahari in 1747 as the Norman Conquest is from a Londoner today, which is to say available in books and absent from experience. This is what the framework means by a build that reached the self-running pole, and it is the reason the entire religious apparatus of the province was, for a conqueror, an asset requiring no maintenance and no persuasion — a standing structure of shrines, *pirs*, sayyids, *qazis* and Sufi lineages whose authority was already there to be borrowed and could not have been manufactured at any price. The Naqshbandi order in its Mujaddidi form, the Chishtis at Chisht-i Sharif in Herat, the Qadiris, and the countless local shrine-keepers were not a resource Ahmad Khan would have to build. They were furniture, and he was a serious enough Sufi himself — a Mujaddidi initiate who would write a mystical treatise and a Pashto *divan* — to know exactly what the furniture was worth.

The Persianate order, and the vocabulary of rule. The second layer is younger and shows its seams, and it is the one that does the most work in this study. Every instrument of government in Kandahar in 1747 was Turco-Persian, and it was Turco-Persian in a country whose tribesmen spoke Pashto. The chronicles were written in Persian; the chancery worked in Persian; the offices carried Turkic and Persian names — *diwan begi*, *ishik aqasi*, *qafila salar*, *yuz bashi*, *ming bashi*, *tupchi bashi*, *marzban* — and the land was held on Turco-Persian terms, in *tiyul* against service.

More than that: when Ahmad Shah's own chronicler comes to explain why the Sadozai were entitled to lead the confederacy, he does not appeal to Pashtun custom at all. He grounds it in *miras*, inheritance, held *bi-dastur-i tora* — in accordance with the customary law — and he glosses *tora* as what is practised by the Turkic sultans, the house of Osman, and the rulers of Hindustan. *Tora* is the Turco-Mongol *töre*, the steppe customary law of Chinggisid and Timurid successor states. The founding claim of the Durrani dynasty, as stated at the Durrani court, is a Turco-Mongol dynastic claim in Persian prose, offered in the company of the Ottomans and the Mughals. It is not a tribal claim, and it was not made to tribesmen.

The tribal order, and the layer whose construction is best documented. Which brings the recursion to its sharpest point, and to the finding that ought to unsettle anyone approaching this case with a picture of timeless Pashtun tribes confronting the empires around them. Of the four layers, the one that looks most primordial is the one whose recent manufacture is most fully recorded in the archive.

Consider the Abdali chieftaincy itself. The earliest Abdali leader named in the sources is Mawdud Sultan, who appears in the Safavid chronicles of Iskandar Beg Turkman and Fazli Beg Khuzani as a *dependant* — the word is *tabi'* — of the Safavid governors of Kandahar. When Shah Abbas I took the province in 1622 and gave it to his Kurdish amir Ganj Ali Khan as a *tiyul*, authority over the province's population was carved in two: the territories from Pushang and Duki through Qalat, Shal and Mastung went to Sher Khan Tarini, and Shahr-i Safa and its dependencies as far as the Kabul border went to Mawdud, along with authority over thirty thousand Abdali households. The title *sultan* was granted, and land with it. In other words, the office of paramount Abdali khan, insofar as such a thing existed, was an administrative grant made by a Safavid shah to a client, with a defined territory and a stated body of subject households, in the same instrument that made a rival Afghan chief his neighbour and his enemy.

The pattern held for a century. Mawdud's principal duties were almost certainly to keep the caravan roads open, which is to say he was the empire's frontier police, paid in land and standing to prevent the tribes from robbing the trade the empire taxed. In

1638 he advised Ali Mardan Khan to hand Kandahar to the Mughals and sent his brother Kamran to Kabul to arrange it, and both brothers were rewarded with cash and robes of honour and presented themselves at Shah Jahan's court in June 1640 with gifts of horses. His son Shah Husayn succeeded him, warned Awrangzib in 1649 that the Safavid garrison at Kandahar was thin, was made a Mughal *mansabdar* with estates in the Punjab and the honorific Wafadar Khan — Faithful Chief — and died at Multan in 1659, where his descendants remained pillars of the local Afghan aristocracy until the Sikhs took the city in 1818.

This is not a tribe standing outside the imperial system. It is a lineage whose entire visible history is a career inside two imperial systems at once, defecting between them as the price moved, holding rank and land from whichever empire held the citadel this decade. And the same is true of the rivalry that would define the region. The Ghilzai chief Mir Ways Hotaki held the Safavid office of *qafila salar*, overseer of the caravan trade, and grew rich on it; his falling-out with the Safavid governor Gurgin Khan turned in part on the office being taken from him and given to another Afghan. When he rose in 1709 and killed Gurgin Khan, he did so with at least tacit Abdali help, on terms Abdali sources say he then broke — and the alliance that made the revolt possible had been cemented by his marriage to the daughter of Ja'far Khan Sadozai. The two confederacies whose enmity would organise Afghan politics for two hundred years begin the eighteenth century as marriage allies in a revolt against a shared employer, and they fall out over the division of the spoils.

Nadir's overwrite, nine years old. The fourth layer was so recent that every man in the Nadirabad assembly of 1747 had watched it being laid. Nadir ended Ghilzai rule in 1738, deported Mir Husayn Hotaki, razed the old citadel, summoned some sixty thousand Abdali families back from Khurasan where he had scattered them, and set the chiefs of the Alakozai and Alizai — the men his *dastur* required him to prefer, precisely because their families had nothing — over the whole. Abd al-Ghani and his son Hajji Khan governed something on the order of two to three hundred thousand Abdali, Ghilzai and other Afghan households from Nadirabad, and were required to keep somewhere between six and twelve thousand Abdali cavalry standing ready for the imperial army, the figure varying with the source. The Alakozai got the Arghandab lands; the Alizai got the fertile Zamindawar. Jonas Hanway, writing in the 1750s from Russian and Persian informants, reports the Afghan division of Nadir's standing army at some fifty thousand men and notes that the Afghans drew salaries on top of their land assignments.

Read the whole of it together and the point about the recursion becomes concrete rather than theoretical. When Ahmad Khan rode into Kandahar in the summer of

1747, the religious order he found was eight hundred years old and required nothing of him; the administrative order was three or four hundred years old and gave him every office and every word he would use; the tribal hierarchy was a hundred and twenty-five years old and had been drawn on a Safavid grant; and the specific distribution of land, rank and grievance among the Abdali chiefs was nine years old and had been made by a man who had died the week before. The deepest layer he could stand on for free. The shallowest he was going to have to fight.

What the jirga was, and what it was not

One feature of this landscape has been doing argumentative work in this collection before it was examined, and it has to be corrected here rather than later, because the correction changes how the whole case reads.

Two things are true and they must be kept apart.

The first is that the jirga was a real institution, old, functioning, and not a colonial or nationalist invention. The earliest outside observer to describe Afghan political life at length was Mountstuart Elphinstone, who led a British embassy to Shah Shuja at Peshawar in 1809 and published his account in 1815. He found a nested, standing system and described it without any sense that he was recording an antiquity: *"The internal government of the Oolooss is carried on by the Khauns, and by assemblies of the heads of divisions. These assemblies are called Jeergas."* The chief presided over the principal jirga, formed of the heads of the great branches; each of those held his own jirga below it, and so downward, so that in matters of consequence the sentiments of the whole tribe could be ascertained before anything was decided. Elphinstone was careful, and added at once that the model was seldom found in full force and that in urgent or trivial matters the khan simply acted — but the institution he described was a working part of the machinery, embedded in the wider customary code of *pashtunwali*, and the code was likewise not decorative. When Mir Husayn Hotaki surrendered Kandahar to Nadir in 1738 and sent his elder sister Bibi Zaynab out to negotiate terms, the chronicle records that it was done *bi rasm-i nanawat* — in the manner of *nanawatai*, the customary suit for protection. A code that governs the surrender of a capital to a foreign emperor is not folklore.

The second truth is that the *loya jirga* — the grand national assembly, capitalised and constitutional — is a different object, and it did not exist in 1747. The compound is not attested in any source before the twentieth century; it appears first in the record of an assembly convened by Amir Amanullah at Jalalabad in 1922, and the label was fixed by the published proceedings of the Paghman assembly of 1924. M. Jamil Hanifi has traced the manufacture in detail and shown how European writers from

Elphinstone onward turned the local Persian narratives of 1747 into a coronation with assisting chiefs, and how Afghan state historiography then took that European reconstruction back and made it the founding scene of the nation. The nine days of deliberation, and the detail that Ahmad Khan alone kept silent and did not campaign for himself, do not come from any eighteenth-century source. They come from Mir Ghulam Muhammad Ghubar's *Ahmad Shah Baba-ye Afghan*, published at Kabul in 1943, where the proposal is made at the ninth gathering — and from there into M. Osman Sedqi's grade-twelve history textbook of 1949, and from the textbook into general circulation. Ghubar's book was awarded a state prize by the Afghan monarchy whose title it explained.

Hanifi is a forceful writer with a case to press, and a single revisionist should not be taken on trust. But the check is available and it holds. Sajjad Nejatie, working through the Persian chronicles independently and without polemical purpose, finds the same thing from the other end: that the sources conflict on where and when Ahmad was chosen, that several put it on the road before Kandahar rather than at any assembly, that the court chronicle records no election and no coronation as such, and that the tidiest version — Sultan Muhammad's *Tarikh-i Sultani* — was composed in the later nineteenth century by a member of the Barakzai elite who had displaced Ahmad Shah's line and who places among the electors a man Nadir had executed in 1738. Thomas Barfield, writing on the modern loya jirga, refers to the 1747 assembly as possibly mythical.

The consequence for this collection is direct and should be stated without hedging. Two existing documents — the Afsharid Iran study and *The Anchor* — rest an important comparison on the nine days, on a young man who did not campaign for himself, and on an outcome genuinely in doubt. The first two of those three details are a twentieth-century nationalist embellishment and cannot be used. The third is a question this study will have to answer from the eighteenth-century record in the next module, and the early indications are that it will not survive either. What the sources do sustain is something narrower and, in framework terms, more interesting: that Ahmad Khan could not confer the title on himself, that it was conferred by a wandering dervish from Lahore whose standing was nobody's to grant, and that the man who conferred it went on to be his spiritual master. That is still a warrant borrowed from an audience's own currency. It is simply not the warrant the corpus has been describing, and the difference will have to be paid for.

Four things at the edges

So much for the ground under his feet. The rest of the board, on that June night, held four moving pieces, and the interesting thing about them is how sharply they divide by whether a man in his position could see them.

Behind him, the Afsharid realm coming apart. This he could see better than almost anyone alive, having stood inside it. Ali Quli Khan, Nadir's nephew and very probably a party to the murder, proclaimed himself Adil Shah — the Just King — on 6 July 1747 and immediately sent men to kill Nadir's sons and grandsons; only Shahrukh, whose mother was a Safavid, was spared, because a Safavid grandmother might one day be needed. Nasrullah and Imam Quli were caught near Marv and executed at Mashhad that same month. Adil Shah held eastern Iran for barely a year before his own brother Ibrahim deposed him, and Ibrahim lasted less than two months after that. The finest army in Asia dissolved in under eighteen months into its component ethnic contingents, each riding home with as much of the treasure as it could carry. Ahmad Khan's own faction did exactly this, intercepting near Kandahar the convoy of Indian gold that Taqi Khan Shirazi and Nasir Khan were escorting from Kabul to Nadir's fortress at Kalat. The amounts reported for that seizure range absurdly — from three million rupees at the low end to two hundred and sixty million at the high — and no figure can be trusted, but the fact of it is not in doubt and it is the single most consequential material event of the year for this study.

In front of him, the Mughal husk. This too was in full view, and its condition was in view partly because Nadir had produced it. Muhammad Shah still reigned at Delhi and would until 1748, but the empire had been hollow for a generation: Bengal effectively autonomous from 1717, Awadh from 1722, Hyderabad from 1724, Malwa and Gujarat conceded to the Marathas. Nadir's invasion had finished the demonstration. After Karnal in February 1739 and the sack of Delhi in March, Muhammad Shah was left on his throne and made to cede every province west of the Indus. That cession is the hinge of the whole eastern half of Ahmad Shah's career and it deserves to be seen for what it was: when he took Kabul, Peshawar and then the Punjab in the winter of 1747–48, he did not need to argue that he had conquered them from the Mughals. He could argue that he had inherited them from Nadir, to whom the Mughal emperor had signed them over in writing. The legal fiction had a real document behind it, and the document had been extracted by an army he had served in.

To the east, the Sikh jathas. Here the field begins to close. In the Punjab that Ahmad Shah would spend a quarter of a century trying to hold, an armed order was assembling itself out of two decades of Mughal persecution. After the death of the

Lahore governor Zakariya Khan on 1 July 1745, the Sikh bands met at Amritsar and reorganised themselves into twenty-five *jathas* of about a hundred horse each; by March 1748 there were sixty-five, and at Baisakhi on 29 March 1748 they combined into the Dal Khalsa under Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. Ahmad Shah's first crossing of the Indus and the founding of the Dal Khalsa are separated by about ten weeks. He never, in nine invasions, found a way to hold the Punjab against this formation, and its successors took Lahore off his governor in 1765 and eventually took the province off his dynasty altogether.

To the south-east, the Marathas. And here the field closes entirely. Baji Rao I had driven Maratha power north through Malwa and Bundelkhand across the 1720s and 1730s on the correct judgement that the Mughal empire was breaking and could not resist; his son Balaji Baji Rao had been peshwa since 1740, and in the spring of 1747 Maratha armies were fighting in Rajasthan, at Rajmahal in March, and would enter Jaipur territory in force in May 1748. Fourteen years later the Maratha confederacy and the Durrani empire would meet at Panipat in the largest battle of the eighteenth century in Asia.

The pattern in those four is the whole reason this landscape is worth building. The two pieces Ahmad Khan could see with precision — the Afsharid succession and the Mughal husk — were the two he moved against first, immediately, and with complete success; within eighteen months he held Kabul, Peshawar and Lahore, and within four years he was taking Herat and Mashhad off the wreck of Nadir's realm. The two he could not see were the two that ended the empire. And the reason he could not see them is not that he was incurious or ill-informed. It is that his position had never furnished the instruments. The apparatus of comparative sight — the embassy, the resident, the standing intelligence, the road that carries reports as well as horses — belonged in this region to the Safavid, Mughal and Nadirid chanceries, and those chanceries had been built to watch Isfahan, Delhi, Bukhara and Istanbul. A Kandahari khan's family had spent a hundred and twenty-five years being paid to guard the roads on exactly those axes. Nothing in that apparatus, and nothing in nine years of guarding a shah's harem, pointed at a peshwa in Pune or a sardar at Amritsar. Those were new formations, growing in the gaps the same imperial collapse had opened, and they were invisible from the inside of the machine that was collapsing.

Reading the ground against the framework

Three things this landscape adds, of which one is a genuine refinement and two are corrections the collection now owes itself.

The refinement: a conqueror inherits his sightlines with the apparatus, and expands along them. The framework already holds that a position fixes the field of the visible before it fixes the ledger, and that whoever governs what reaches a position governs the decision before any weighing begins. The Kandahar landscape sharpens that into something predictive. Where a conqueror takes over a naturalised prior order, he does not merely inherit its offices, its revenue system and its legitimating vocabulary — he inherits *its horizon*, because the instruments of seeing were built by the order he is capturing and were built to watch the things that order cared about. The Safavid–Mughal–Nadirid apparatus in Indo-Khurasan was constructed along a Herat–Kandahar–Kabul–Peshawar–Lahore axis to watch Isfahan, Delhi and Bukhara, and it had employed the Abdali khans for a century as the road-guards of that axis. Ahmad Shah's empire is that axis, extended: he took precisely the ground the apparatus he captured had been designed to see, and he took it fast. What he could not see were the powers that had grown up *outside* the apparatus, in the space its own decay had opened — a confederacy in the Deccan and an armed religious order in the Punjab, neither of which any Persianate chancery had ever needed a file on.

The general form is worth stating for testing against other cases: **expect a successor state's reach to be predicted by the sightlines of the apparatus it captured rather than by its founder's ambition, and expect the threats that end it to come from formations that grew in the blind spots that same apparatus had.** This is not fatalism and it does not excuse anyone; the Marathas and the Sikhs were both visible to somebody, and a ruler who had built new instruments of sight rather than inheriting old ones might have priced them earlier. It is a claim about where to look first when a conquest expands brilliantly in one direction and is destroyed from another.

First correction: on the recursion, the shallowest layer is the best documented and the most contested. The collection's standing formulation is that the conqueror meets a naturalised former conquest which has reached the self-running pole. Kandahar shows the layers reaching that pole at very different rates, and shows that the layer which *looks* most primordial — the tribal order, with its genealogies running back to a common ancestor and its customary law — is here the layer whose recent construction is most fully recorded in imperial archives. The Abdali paramount chieftaincy is a Safavid grant of 1622, with a stated territory and a stated number of subject households, made in an instrument that simultaneously created the confederacy's chief rival. Islam, by contrast, is eight hundred years deep and leaves no trace of having been imposed, because at that depth nothing does. The practical implication for the framework is a sequencing rule: **rank the layers by depth before predicting which the conqueror will use free and which he will have to buy or**

break. Ahmad Shah rented the religious apparatus at no cost, took the administrative vocabulary whole, and spent the first years of his reign killing Abdali chiefs.

Second correction: the corpus has been standing on a 1943 source. The nine-day deliberation and the silent candidate at Kandahar in 1747, on which both the Afsharid study and *The Anchor* rest a controlled comparison, are not in the eighteenth-century record. They enter it through an Afghan nationalist history published in 1943 and a state textbook of 1949, downstream of a nineteenth-century European reconstruction of the Persian chronicles. This is not, in itself, a fatal blow to the argument those documents were making, since the eighteenth-century record does still show a title conferred by a figure the claimant did not control. But it is a real error, and the discipline the collection holds itself to requires it to be named at the point of discovery rather than quietly reworded later. The general lesson is one the collection has learned before in other registers and should hold harder: **a founding scene that is unusually well suited to a later state's self-image should be traced to its earliest attestation before it is used as evidence,** and the tell to look for is a detail too neat to be incidental — a number like nine, a silence, an unanimity — surviving into modern accounts without a chain of citation behind it.

The rest of the case now proceeds on the eighteenth-century record. What that record shows in the summer of 1747 is a man with no rank worth the name, an inherited claim, three or four thousand armed countrymen, a captured treasure convoy of unknown but enormous size, and a set of rivals whom the last conqueror had deliberately raised above him. What he did with those materials in the following eight weeks is the subject of the next module.

A note on sources. The primary quotations here are exact and are given from the sources named. Mountstuart Elphinstone's *An Account of the Kingdom of Caubul* (first published 1815; quoted here from the 1839 edition, Book II, chapter 2) is in the public domain and is quoted verbatim on the jirga. The Persian terms — *dar al-qarar* for Kandahar, *miras* and *bi-dastur-i tora* for the Sadozai claim to leadership, *tiyul*, *yarghamal* and *suhbat-yasawul*, and *bi rasm-i nanawat* for Mir Husayn Hotaki's surrender in 1738 — are as they appear in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Persian chronicles: Mahmud al-Husayni's *Tarikh-i Ahmad Shahi* (composed c. 1753–74, cited from Dostmurad Saidmuradov's Moscow edition), Mahdi Khan Astarabadi's *Jahangusha-yi Nadiri*, Muhammad Kazim Marvi's *Alam-ara-yi Nadiri*, Ali Muhammad Khan's *Tazkirat al-muluk-i ali-shan*, and Sultan Muhammad Khan Barakzai's *Tarikh-i Sultani*. Nadir Shah's rule for handling tribal aristocracies is paraphrased from Mahmud al-Husayni (fols. 13b–14a), with the phrase about the collar of servitude given as the chronicler's own; the translation from which that

paraphrase works is Sajjad Nejatie's. Père Louis Bazin's figure of four thousand Afghans at the camp comes from his letter on Nadir's last years, printed in the *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*; Imam al-Din Husayni's figure of three thousand is from the *Husayn Shahi*. Jonas Hanway's *An Historical Account of the British Trade over the Caspian Sea* (3rd ed., 1762) is the source for the fifty thousand Afghans in Nadir's standing army and for the Afghan salaries, and is a report at second hand rather than an eyewitness count.

Modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited. The reconstruction of Abdali history before 1747 — Mawdud Sultan's grant of 1622 and the thirty thousand households, the Abdali as Safavid and Mughal *marzbans* on the caravan roads, Shah Husayn's Mughal *mansab* and the honorific Wafadar Khan, Nadir's deliberate elevation of the Alakozai and Alizai over the old aristocracy, and the demolition of the claim that Ahmad Khan commanded four thousand cavalry or rode to Delhi in 1739 — follows Sajjad Nejatie, *The Pearl of Pearls: The Abdali-Durrani Confederacy and Its Transformation under Ahmad Shah, Durr-i Durran* (PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 2017), which is the fullest source-critical treatment available and on which this module leans heavily. Christine Noelle-Karimi's work on Herat and on Durrani portrayal in eighteenth-century historiography, and Jos Gommans's on the Indo-Afghan horse trade, stand behind the account of the trade corridor. On the loya jirga, M. Jamil Hanifi, "Editing the Past: Colonial Production of Hegemony through the 'Loya Jerga' in Afghanistan," *Iranian Studies* 37, no. 2 (2004), 295–322, and his Encyclopaedia Iranica article "Jerga"; Hanifi's reading is polemical and is treated here as one voice, corroborated on the source-critical points by Nejatie and reflected in Thomas Barfield's treatment of the 1747 assembly as possibly mythical. Jonathan L. Lee's *Afghanistan: A History from 1260 to the Present* (2018) reads the accession as a military coup by a small clique; that reading is registered here and tested in the next module. The Safavid–Mughal contest for Kandahar follows the standard accounts and Rudi Matthee's *Persia in Crisis*; the Islamisation of Zabulistan and Kabulistan follows the standard chronology of the Zunbils, the Saffarid conquest of about 870, and Ghaznavid-era Islamisation.

Contested figures are given as ranges and should be treated as such. Ahmad Shah's birth is placed between 1720 and 1722, and his birthplace is disputed between Herat and Multan — modern scholarship has generally favoured Multan, while Nejatie argues that the sources from his own lifetime, including the *Tarikh-i Ahmad Shahi*, give Herat. The Afghan contingent at Nadir's camp is given at three to four thousand. The Nadirid treasure seized near Kandahar is reported at figures between three million and two hundred and sixty million rupees across the sources and cannot be established; no eyewitness account survives. The Abdali families summoned back to Kandahar in

1738 are given at about sixty thousand, and the households under the governor of Nadirabad at two to three hundred thousand, both on chronicle report rather than any survey. The Abdali cavalry required for Nadir's standing army is given at six to seven thousand by Mahmud al-Husayni and twelve thousand by Muhammad Kazim. The date of Ahmad Shah's accession is variously reported: a royal edict of 15 July 1747 recorded in Anand Ram Mukhlis's *tazkira* would place it no later than mid-July, while Wakili Popalzai gives 21 Rajab 1160 / 28 July 1747 without stating a source, and the October 1747 date repeated in most English accounts descends from Elphinstone.

MODULE 1

The Treasure That Never Reached Kalat

The floor of force — eight weeks between a murder in Khorasan and a wheat-sheaf laid on a turban, and the arithmetic underneath it: who was paid, who was bought, and who was trampled

The morning after

By first light on 20 June 1747 the news of Nadir's death had gone round the camp at Fathabad and the camp had begun to come apart along the seams the shah himself had cut into it. The Qizilbash who had done the killing — Afshar and Qajar officers of the household regiments — moved next against the Afghan quarter, which lay below the royal tent, on the reasonable assumption that Nadir's Afghans would avenge him or at minimum would have to be disarmed before anything else could proceed. Word of the plan reached the Afghans first. They joined with the Uzbek troops attached to the court, fought the Qizilbash off, and got clear. Mahmud al-Husayni's account adds that Ahmad Khan personally led the counter-attack, killing and taking prisoners and scattering the rest before turning east with captured equipment and captives in hand; the Nadirid chroniclers agree at least that he helped bring his men out of the confusion alive.

What he had, that morning, was between three and four thousand Afghan cavalry. That is the whole of it. He had no province, no revenue, no artillery train, no fortress, and no rank — the command of the Afghan contingent belonged to Nur Muhammad Khan Alizai, who was not present, being at Kandahar preparing to escort the imperial treasure to Nadir's fortress at Kalat. He had a lineage: his father Muhammad Zaman Khan had ruled Herat, his brother Zu al-Faqar Khan after him, and the Sadozai were the first family of the Abdali. He had a small circle of confidants he had picked himself years earlier, when he asked Nadir for ten men from the Abdali contingent and the contingent's chief sent him ten useless ones — among the ten he then chose were the men who would become his grand wazir, his commander-in-chief and his head of the treasury. And he had a Lahori dervish named Sabir Shah, who had attached himself to the camp and had been telling anyone who would listen that Nadir's days were numbered and that Ahmad Khan would be king.

Set against that, the men who actually held Kandahar province: Nur Muhammad Khan Alizai, commander of Kandahar and chief of the Abdali in Nadir's army; Hajji

Khan, son of the late Abd al-Ghani Alakozai, governing Nadirabad; Muhabbat Khan, Manu Khan and Gadu Khan of the Popalzai, holding the citadel, the intelligence office and a command between them. Every one of these men had been raised by Nadir over Ahmad Khan's head, and raised precisely because their families had no claim of their own. The floor Ahmad Khan needed to build was going to have to be built on top of, or out of, men whose entire position depended on his family staying where Nadir had put it.

The march east ran from Khabushan to Turshiz by way of Sultan Maydan, then to Turbat-i Haydariyya, where news came that Nadir's nephew Ali Quli Khan had sent a force out of Herat to cut them off. When that force turned out to be a feint, the column went on to Tun and then to Farah, where it defeated a second detachment, and from Farah to Girishk on the Helmand, a few days west of Kandahar. It was a fighting retreat across five hundred miles of a collapsing empire, foraging as it went, and by the time it reached Girishk it had done nothing that a competent colonel could not have done. Everything that followed turned on a decision taken there.

Girishk

The Mughal emperor had been squeezed one last time before Nadir died. Nadir had written to Delhi demanding all the gold in Muhammad Shah's possession, and the resulting treasure — an enormous consignment whose size no source agrees on — was at that moment being escorted westward from Kabul by Taqi Khan Shirazi and Nasir Khan, the governors of Kabul and Peshawar, bound for the fortress at Kalat. Their escort was to rendezvous outside Kandahar with Nur Muhammad Khan Alizai, who had encamped at Chaman-i Sanjari, about a farsakh west of the citadel, to take the convoy on the last leg.

From Girishk, Ahmad Khan sent messengers ahead. They were to tell Nur Muhammad and the Abdali khans in his retinue that Nadir was dead — which they did not yet know — and to advise them not to move the treasure to Kalat as planned. The advice was taken. The Abdali officers stripped Taqi Khan and Nasir Khan of the convoy and went into Kandahar with it.

The reported sums are useless as arithmetic and instructive as testimony. Ghulam Ali Khan Naqawi gives ten lakhs of gold *ashrafis*. Sultan Muhammad gives two crores — twenty million, presumably rupees — and Ferrier the same, in money, diamonds and shawls. A tradition preserved by Fayz Muhammad on the authority of Azar Begdili gives twenty-six crores, or two hundred and sixty million. Jadunath Sarkar, unpersuaded, gives thirty lakhs. No eyewitness account survives and the true figure will not be recovered. What can be said is that every source, hostile and friendly alike, agrees

that the amount was transformative, and that Ahmad Khan's part in securing it is the fact that turns him from one claimant among several into the claimant.

It is worth pausing on what had just happened, because the founding legend cannot accommodate it and the framework can. A body of cavalry with no legal standing intercepted a state treasury in transit, by persuading the officers guarding it — officers appointed by the dead sovereign, and outranking the man who sent the message — that the sovereign was dead and the money was now theirs. This is the founding act of the Durrani state, and it is banditry. Not metaphorically: the physical seizure of another polity's specie by armed men who had no title to it. Every later structure in this study — the tribal subsidies, the tax exemptions, the campaigns, the Sadozai monarchy that lasted seventy years and the Durrani confederacy that ruled Afghanistan into the twentieth century — stands on that convoy, and the framework's claim that a durable order begins as force and has a story laid over it afterwards is not, in this case, an inference. It is a chronology with dates.

There is also a second thing in the episode, and it is the one that distinguishes what follows from what had gone before. Nadir's own Indian plunder had gone to Kalat and stayed there, behind a guard of his best troops, still largely untouched while his tax collectors were driving villagers into the hills. This convoy was headed for the same fortress and never arrived. What Ahmad Khan did with it was the exact opposite of what the man he had served for nine years had done with the same kind of windfall, and the difference was not a matter of temperament. He needed the money to buy something Nadir had never needed to buy, and he needed it within weeks.

Nadirabad

Sometime in July 1747 — the dating is imprecise and worth stating precisely as imprecise — an assembly of Abdali khans met at the shrine of Sher-i Surkh Baba, inside the fort Nadir had built at Nadirabad, and Ahmad Khan came out of it as Ahmad Shah, *Durr-i Durran*, Pearl of Pearls.

The corpus has hitherto described that assembly as a nine-day deliberation among rival candidates in which a young man who did not campaign for himself was named by a religious figure, at real risk of the answer going otherwise, and has treated it as the clean case of a warlord submitting to a body he did not control. The eighteenth-century record does not sustain that description, and the difference matters enough to set out.

Take first what the sources actually contain. Mahmud al-Husayni's *Tarikh-i Ahmad Shahi*, composed at the Durrani court from about 1754 and the closest thing to an official account, has the great khans, chiefs and commanders deliberate at Kandahar

and then implore Ahmad to sit on what the chronicle calls the hereditary throne of sovereignty — *awrang-i saltanat-i mawrusi* — on the grounds that leadership was his by *miras*, inheritance. Ahmad declines, preferring seclusion and contemplation. Sabir Shah then appears, perceives the radiance of authority on him, fixes a tuft of green grass — *giyah-i sabzi* — to the side of his turban in place of a royal plume, recites a prayer, and those present acknowledge him. There is no election in the chronicle and no coronation as such. There are no nine days, no roll of rival candidates, and no vote.

Several other eighteenth-century sources place the choice earlier and elsewhere. The *Bayan-i waqi'*, Gulistana's *Mujmal al-tawarikh* and Imam al-Din's *Husayn Shahi* all have the Afghan chiefs settle on a leader *on the road*, before reaching Kandahar, on the wholly practical grounds that to enter a city patrolled by Qizilbash without a single command would be dangerous. In Gulistana's version they put a bunch of wheat on his head in place of a crown and gave him the title. In the Khudaka Sadozai tradition preserved in the *Tazkirat al-muluk-i ali-shan* the consent was explicitly conditional: the chiefs agreed to Ahmad Khan on the understanding that if a suitable candidate appeared among the descendants of Sultan Ali Muhammad Khan, he would replace him. And the same source records that when Abd al-Ghani Alakozai objected to the arrangement on the road, Ahmad Khan sent a party of Abdali to kill him, in order to preserve unity in the ranks — a detail which may be a confusion with the fate of Nur Muhammad, but which is present in two independent traditions and which nobody preserved because it was flattering.

The nine days and the silence are not in any of this. They enter the record in 1943, in Mir Ghulam Muhammad Ghubar's *Ahmad Shah Baba-ye Afghan*, where the proposal comes at the ninth gathering and Ahmad Khan is the only man who does not speak on his own behalf; from there into the standard Afghan school textbook of 1949, and from the textbook into general circulation in English. The account before Ghubar's — Sultan Muhammad's *Tarikh-i Sultani*, written in the later nineteenth century — is itself a Barakzai reconstruction that inflates the kingmaking role of Hajji Jamal Khan Barakzai, includes among the electors a man Nadir had executed nine years before the assembly, and states plainly that the khans consented only on the understanding that Ahmad's rule would depend on them and could be undone if required. That is a nineteenth-century dynasty explaining, in retrospect, why the dynasty it had displaced never held its throne by right.

So the honest reconstruction, which is Nejatie's and which the sources will bear, runs roughly thus. On the road, a faction of Abdali leaders settled on Ahmad Khan as a unity measure of uncertain duration. His part in taking the Nadirid treasure then converted that provisional choice into something firmer, because in a subsequent

assembly at Nadirabad he secured the allegiance of a core faction *through the distribution of largesse* — the sources are explicit and repetitive about the titles, jewelled diadems and robes of honour handed out at this moment. And Sabir Shah, who was nobody's client, put grass in his turban and made it a thing that had been done rather than a thing that had been bought.

Held against the framework, this is neither a disappointment nor a demolition. Two of the three claims the corpus was resting on have to go: the nine days are a modern embellishment, and the proposition that the outcome was genuinely in doubt cannot survive a reading in which the man doing the choosing had the treasure, the troops, the lineage, and a rival killed on the road. But the third claim survives, and it survives in a sharper form. Ahmad Khan could not put the grass in his own turban. That had to be done by someone whose standing he did not confer and could not manufacture, and the man who did it was a wandering dervish from Lahore with no property, no office and no tribe — which is precisely why the gesture was worth anything. A title is worth the independence of whoever confers it, and the poverty of the conferrer was the guarantee. What the corpus should have been pointing at was never the nine days. It was the fact that the richest man in Kandahar that week needed a beggar to make him king.

The other register

The assembly did not settle the matter, and the chronicle written to celebrate Ahmad Shah is the source that says so.

His first act as shah was to require the chiefs, amirs and governors of the region to pledge allegiance. Many did and were rewarded handsomely, in the chronicle's phrase. Others refused: Karam Khan Tarini at Pushang in Baluchistan, and Maqsud Khan Barechi at Shorabak. Ahmad Shah sent two Durrani commanders, Muhabbat Khan and Manu Khan, to punish them. Both commanders were themselves already inside a conspiracy against him, together with Nur Muhammad Khan Alizai — Nadir's appointed chief of the Abdali, the man whose job Ahmad Shah had effectively taken — along with Miyan Dad Ishaqzai and Abd al-Rahman Barakzai. Sent out to suppress a revolt, Muhabbat and Manu joined it.

The plot was betrayed by Nawab Khan Alakozai, who had been sent along with the punitive force and who slipped back to Kandahar to inform the shah. Ahmad Shah verified the intelligence and then had Nur Muhammad Khan and Miyan Dad Ishaqzai trampled to death by elephants. He spared Abd al-Rahman Barakzai and in fact promoted him to head of the heavy artillery, which is suspicious enough that Nejatie reads it as payment for a service rendered in the arrests. He then defeated Muhabbat's

and Manu's forces outside Kandahar; Muhabbat, Manu and Gadu Khan were imprisoned and never heard of again.

Count what that is. Within months of the assembly, the man Nadir had made chief of the Abdali was executed by an animal in public; a second khan with him; three more disappeared into a prison; two provincial lords were reduced by force; and the one conspirator who survived rose. The Durrani order was not founded by a jirga's consent and then troubled by later dissent. It was founded by the systematic physical elimination of the leadership Nadir had installed, carried out in the first year, and recorded — this is the point worth holding — by Ahmad Shah's own paid historian, who saw nothing in it that required concealment.

Nor did it stop. Ahmad Shah's nephew Luqman Khan, son of the elder brother who had ruled Herat, was made Khan of Khans and given the governorship of Kandahar, and in about 1751–52 revolted while the shah was in India, holding Ahmad Shah's son Timur and the royal women hostage in the city and raising a militia out of the treasury. He was defeated and spared; his revenue agent and many of his associates were executed. Shafqat Khan Durrani was punished for unspecified treacheries and died soon after in 1748–49. Mir Khwush Khan Durrani raised a revolt near Kandahar as late as 1767–68. And at the very end of the reign the grand wazir Shah Wali Khan — one of the ten men Ahmad Shah had hand-picked in Mazandaran thirty years earlier — was manoeuvring to put his own son-in-law on the throne.

That list is the real texture of the founding, and it should be read against a specific temptation. The order that emerged did last, and durability invites the retrospective assumption that it was welcomed. It was not welcomed. It was imposed on the Abdali chieftaincy by a man who killed the incumbents, and the men who had raised him kept trying to unmake him for twenty-five years.

The instrument

What did the floor actually consist of, once it was standing?

It consisted, first and most importantly, of a military system taken over entire from the order it replaced. Ahmad Shah did not invent an army; he had served in the best one in Asia for nine years and he rebuilt it in miniature. The Nadirid model was cavalry-heavy, mobile, and built around light firepower that could keep up with horses: the *zamburak*, a small swivel gun mounted on a camel and fired from the kneeling animal, which Nadir had used to devastating effect at Damghan, Yeghevard and Karnal, and which the Durrani army would deploy at Panipat in numbers reported at around two thousand. The bulk of the force was tribal cavalry with lance and sword. Infantry

mattered little. Heavy siege artillery, in the early years, he simply did not have, and it cost him.

Second, it consisted of a professional corps of *ghulams* — slave-soldiers, *qullar* in the Turkic register — set up at the very beginning of the reign under Ja'far Khan Popalzai as *qullar-aqasi*. Later writers describe this corps as a body of Iranians deliberately balanced against the Durrani, and for Timur Shah's reign that is broadly right; for Ahmad Shah's it is anachronistic, since the chronicle shows Achakzai and Ishaqzai serving as *ghulams* alongside Qizilbash Javanshir. But the direction of travel is unmistakable even under Ahmad Shah, and by the Panipat campaign the slave cavalry under Mahmud Khan *Qullar-aqasi* — a Kurd whom Nadir had captured, castrated and made a harem eunuch, and who came over to Ahmad Shah during the Khorasan campaign of 1754–55 — numbered eight or nine thousand and was posted at the rear of the shah's own position.

Third, and inseparable from the first two, it consisted of Qizilbash. The men who had murdered Nadir and then tried to massacre the Afghans in the camp at Fathabad were, within a few years, a valued component of the Durrani army, recruited precisely because they had served in the Nadirid military and knew the trade. This is worth stating without sentiment, because it is a clean instance of a general rule: an army is a body of skills, and skills do not carry grudges as reliably as chroniclers do.

The founding conquest, then, ran on an instrument that was Nadir's in design, Nadir's in personnel at the technical levels, funded by Nadir's money, and pointed at Nadir's provinces. The one thing about it that was not Nadir's was the basis on which the tribal cavalry turned out, and that is the subject of the module that follows.

Nine months

The campaign season that opened in the autumn of 1747 is the fastest phase of the whole reign and it should be read as one motion.

He began with the Ghilzai, taking Qalat-i Ghilji and then Ghazni, which secured the road north-east and settled the older of the two rivalries. Then Kabul, which fell without a serious defence. Then, with Jahan Khan sent ahead toward Peshawar, Jalalabad; Nasir Khan, the Mughal governor, did not hold the Khyber and fled; and as the Afghan force came up, the frontier Pashtun tribes — Yusufzai, Afridi, Khattak — declared for the shah. Peshawar was taken and Nasir Khan withdrew to Delhi. On the evidence of a royal edict recorded in Anand Ram Mukhlis's *tazkira*, Ahmad Shah was already issuing appointments to Afridi chiefs of the Peshawar region on 15 July 1747, which is to say within about three weeks of reaching Kandahar and before any of this had happened militarily. The claim ran ahead of the army.

He left Peshawar in December 1747 and crossed the Indus at Attock. The Punjab was in the middle of a fratricidal collapse of its own — Zakariya Khan had died in 1745, his son Yahya Khan had been overthrown by his brother Shah Nawaz Khan, and Shah Nawaz, unrecognised by Delhi, had opened correspondence with the Afghans and then thought better of it. On 11 January 1748 the two forces met near Lahore and the Durrani won; the city was entered on the 12th. Then east toward Sirhind, where a Mughal army under the wazir Qamar ud-Din Khan and the prince Ahmad Shah Bahadur was assembling, with a Jaipur contingent under Ishwari Singh alongside.

At Manupur, on 11 March 1748, Ahmad Shah lost.

Qamar ud-Din was killed early in the action by artillery fire, which ought to have decided it the other way; his son Mu'in ul-Mulk — Mir Mannu — took the command and held. The Afghan force, without a comparable train of guns, could not break the Mughal position, and Ahmad Shah withdrew and went home. The numbers in the accounts cannot be reconciled with one another: the Durrani strength at Lahore and Manupur is given variously at figures from about twelve thousand to about thirty thousand, and the Mughal army at sixty to seventy thousand combatants with a further hundred and thirty thousand or so camp followers. None of these should be treated as counts.

The defeat belongs in this module rather than being deferred, for two reasons. It establishes the actual capability of the floor in its founding year — good enough to walk through a disintegrating province, not yet good enough to beat a Mughal field army with guns — and it establishes the shape of the whole eastern enterprise. Ahmad Shah would cross the Indus nine times in twenty-two years. He never held India. He collected from it.

The floor that could not reach

Here the case bends the framework, and the bend is the module's real finding.

The standard question at this point in a study is why the ordinary subject cannot simply leave: what geographic, legal or economic fact converts the arrangement from a contract into a trap. In most of the cases in this collection the answer is some form of immobility — the peasant is tied to a field he cannot carry, the labourer to a compound he cannot legally quit, the town-dweller to a wall and a garrison.

In Kandahar in 1747 there were two populations and the answer was different for each.

The settled cultivators of the province — Parsiwans, Hazaras, Kakars, Baluchis, in Henry Rawlinson's later description of the land registers, with only a small number of Afghans among the proprietors — were immobile in the fullest sense. Their livelihood

was irrigated agriculture, and irrigation in that country means the *karez*: an underground channel driven back into the water table, dug and maintained at enormous cost in labour over years. A man who walks away from a *karez* walks away from the accumulated work of generations and cannot take it with him or rebuild it somewhere else in a season. On these people the floor could sit in the ordinary way, and it did. Nadir had already converted the province's land to *khalisa*, state land, and transferred the rights over the best of it to Abdali chiefs; over Ahmad Shah's reign the Durrani would spread across the drier valleys and into the peasant lands and the crown lands until, on Rawlinson's reading of the registers, roughly three-quarters of the crown lands had passed to Durrani management, taxed at a third to a half of produce, and the old peasantry had been reduced to working for Durrani landowners at subsistence.

The Durrani themselves were the opposite case. In 1747 they were, in the same source's blunt phrase, shepherds, ignorant of husbandry. They were pastoralists with summer and winter pastures, movable wealth, and the whole of the Toba and Suleiman highlands to withdraw into. Nadir had needed to *summon* sixty thousand Abdali families back from Khurasan; you cannot summon a population you can simply coerce. And they were the armed force. The instrument of the floor and the population most capable of escaping it were the same people.

That is the structural fact from which nearly everything in this study follows, and it can be stated as a rule. **Where the population that supplies the floor can disperse, the floor cannot be used to price its defection, and the ruler must buy its compliance rather than compel it.** The Durrani tax exemption and the tribal subsidies, which the corpus's earlier notes treated as a generous settlement or as evidence of a genuinely shared arrangement, are neither generosity nor fellowship. They are the price of a floor that cannot reach the men who constitute it. Ahmad Shah could trample Nur Muhammad Khan with an elephant, because Nur Muhammad Khan was one man in a fort. He could not have coerced the Achakzai out of the Kadani valley in any season, at any price he could afford, and he never tried.

The consequence, which will run through the whole reign, is that the order had to be funded from outside itself. A ruler who must pay his own army's tribes rather than tax them has to find the money somewhere, and the somewhere available was the settled, immobile, richly productive peasantry of the Punjab, Kashmir, Sindh and Khorasan — populations on whom the floor could sit in the ordinary way because they had *karez* and canals and cities and could not walk into the mountains. Nine invasions of India is not a personality. It is a fiscal requirement generated by the shape of the founding coalition.

Reading the founding against the framework

The floor came first and it was not consensual. The sequence at Kandahar in 1747 is: a body of cavalry escapes a murdered king's camp; it robs a treasury in transit; the money buys a faction; a dervish sanctifies the result; and the men who would not accept it are killed with elephants or disappear into prison. The founding legend — the assembly, the wheat, the unanimous acclamation — is not false in the way a fabrication is false, since an assembly did meet and a holy man did put grass in a turban, but it is arranged so that the money and the killing fall outside the frame. The framework's ordering claim survives the case intact and with unusual clarity, because the chronology is documented to within weeks.

The corpus's reading of the accession is corrected here rather than defended. The nine-day deliberation and the candidate who kept silent are a twentieth-century embellishment and are withdrawn. The proposition that the outcome was genuinely uncertain is not supportable against a record in which the claimant had already killed a rival on the road and had just come into a treasury. What survives, and should replace them, is narrower and more useful as a general principle: **a warrant is worth exactly the independence of whoever confers it, and the surest sign that a conferrer is independent is that he has nothing the claimant could have given him.** Sabir Shah owned nothing, held no office, belonged to no tribe in Kandahar, and was not from the country. That is why the grass counted. Watch, in other cases, for the propertyless sanctifier, and treat wealth or office in the hands of the man performing the investiture as a discount on the warrant's value.

The refinement this module contributes: where the population can disperse, the floor buys instead of compelling. The framework's cost-column question assumes a subject who cannot leave and asks what holds him. This case supplies the complementary condition and its consequence. A pastoral, armed, mobile population cannot be priced by a credible threat, because the threat has nowhere to land; a ruler drawn from such a population and dependent on it for force therefore has to purchase what other rulers extract, and the purchase price becomes a permanent, non-negotiable charge on the order. Two predictions follow and both are testable in the modules ahead. First, **expect such an order to run a split floor** — compulsion on the immobile, purchase on the mobile — with the settlement and the extraction sorted accordingly, so that the same state is a tax-farm in one district and a payroll in another. Second, **expect the purchase to be funded externally, and expect the order's foreign policy to be the shape of that funding requirement.** An order that cannot tax its own soldiers must raid someone who can be taxed, and will keep raiding for as long as the coalition holds together, which means the campaigns are not evidence of

appetite but of structure. When the external revenue fails, the payment stops, and the coalition it was buying discovers that the floor was never over it in the first place.

That last sentence is a prediction about the collapse, offered now so that it can be tested against the evidence rather than fitted to it later.

A note on sources. The Persian terms are given as they stand in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century chronicles: *awrang-i saltanat-i mawrusi* and *miras* for the claim put to Ahmad at the assembly, *giyah-i sabzi* for the tuft of green grass, *qullar* and *qullar-aqasi* for the slave-soldiers and their commander, *khalisa*, *tiyul*, *ra'iyyati*, *khushk-aba*, *nawabad* and *karez* for the land and water categories. The principal narrative sources are Mahmud al-Husayni's *Tarikh-i Ahmad Shahi* (composed from c. 1754, cited from Dostmurad Saidmuradov's Moscow edition), Mahdi Khan Astarabadi's *Jahangusha-yi Nadiri*, Muhammad Kazim Marvi's *Alam-ara-yi Nadiri*, Abd al-Karim Kashmiri's *Bayan-i waqi'*, Gulistana's *Mujmal al-tawarikh ba'd-i Nadiriyya*, Imam al-Din Husayni's *Husayn Shahi*, Ali Muhammad Khan's *Tazkirat al-muluk-i ali-shan*, Ghulam Husayn Khan's *Siyar al-muta'akhkhirin*, and — for the later and tendentious reconstruction — Sultan Muhammad Khan Barakzai's *Tarikh-i Sultani* and Fayz Muhammad Katib's *Siraj al-tawarikh*. Père Louis Bazin, Nadir's physician and an eyewitness at the camp, is the source for four thousand Afghans present; Imam al-Din gives three thousand. The royal edict of 15 July 1747 appointing an Afridi chief is recorded in the *tazkira* of Anand Ram "Mukhlis."

Modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited. The reconstruction of the accession — the divergence between the on-the-road and at-Kandahar traditions, the demolition of the "commander of four thousand cavalry" claim, the conditional consent in the Khudaka tradition, the killing of Abd al-Ghani and the possibility that it is a conflation with the execution of Nur Muhammad, the execution by elephant of Nur Muhammad and Miyan Dad, the fate of Muhabbat, Manu and Gadu, the revolts of Luqman Khan, Shafqat Khan and Mir Khwush Khan, and above all the finding that Ahmad secured his core faction through the distribution of largesse — follows Sajjad Nejatie, *The Pearl of Pearls: The Abdali-Durrani Confederacy and Its Transformation under Ahmad Shah, Durr-i Durran* (PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 2017), which this module leans on heavily and which is the fullest source-critical treatment in print. The chain by which the nine days and the silent candidate reach modern accounts — Ghubar's *Ahmad Shah Baba-ye Afghan* (Kabul, 1943), the school textbook of 1949, and behind them the nineteenth-century European reconstructions — is traced by M. Jamil Hanifi, "Editing the Past," *Iranian Studies* 37, no. 2 (2004), 295–322, and is corroborated on the source-critical points by Nejatie. Jonathan L. Lee's reading of the accession as a military coup by a small clique is registered and is

broadly borne out here. Henry Rawlinson's "Report on the Dooranee Tribes" (c. 1841), which drew on the military register of Ahmad Shah's government and on land records now lost, is the source for the land categories, for the description of the Durrani in 1747 as pastoralists ignorant of husbandry, and for the transfer of peasant and crown land into Durrani hands; it is a colonial administrator's report resting on documents that can no longer be checked, and should be treated as valuable and unverifiable in equal measure. Ganda Singh's *Ahmad Shah Durrani* (1959) remains the standard narrative biography and is the source, at second hand, for several of the treasure figures. Jos Gommans's work on the Indo-Afghan military economy stands behind the account of the cavalry and the horse trade.

Contested figures are given as ranges and should not be treated as counts. The Afghan force leaving Nadir's camp is given at three to four thousand. The seized Nadirid treasure is reported at figures between three million and two hundred and sixty million rupees across the sources; no eyewitness account survives and the sum cannot be established. Durrani strength at Lahore and Manupur is variously given between about twelve and about thirty thousand, and the Mughal force at sixty to seventy thousand combatants; these are chronicle estimates in a genre that inflates, and they conflict with one another within single accounts. The date of Ahmad Shah's accession is unsettled: the edict of 15 July 1747 would place it no later than mid-July, Wakili Popalzai gives 21 Rajab 1160 / 28 July 1747 without stating a source, and the October 1747 date repeated in most English accounts descends from Elphinstone. The number of Durrani cavalry owed to the state is given at six to seven thousand by Mahmud al-Husayni and twelve thousand by Muhammad Kazim. Where a source is partisan — and every source here is partisan, the court chronicle for the Sadozai and the *Tarikh-i Sultani* against them — the partisanship is stated in the text rather than filtered out, on the principle that the direction of a distortion is usually more informative than the fact of it.

MODULE 2

A Horseman for Every Plough

The settlement — what was distributed at Kandahar, on what condition, to whom, and under which legal fiction; and why a grant dressed as a restoration made the Durrani chiefs the defenders of the dynasty and the enemies of every particular king

What the instrument found

Before anything can be said about what was distributed, the prior condition has to be on the page, because the whole character of the transaction turns on it.

In the opening decades of the eighteenth century the arable land of Kandahar province was worked by a mixed peasantry — Parsiwans, Hazaras, Kakars, Baluchis — with a small number of Afghans among the proprietors. This is the description given in a report compiled around 1841 by Henry Rawlinson, who had access to the military register of Ahmad Shah's own government and to land records that have since disappeared, and it is the closest thing to a cadastral baseline the case affords. Under Ghilzai rule between 1709 and 1738 those proprietors went on remitting tax at the rates they had paid to the Safavid governors. The land, in other words, was held in the ordinary way of an old Persianate province: cultivators on fields, proprietors above them, a rate assessed on produce, and a governor collecting it.

And the Abdali were not on it. They were, in Rawlinson's blunt phrase, shepherds, ignorant of husbandry. Their wealth was in flocks and their claim to the country was a claim of pasture and passage, not of freehold. The one thing the Abdali chiefs did hold in a formal sense was an office, and even that had come from outside: Elphinstone, writing in 1815 and with no case to press about it, records that the earliest evidence of Sadozai pre-eminence is *"a patent from one of the first of the Suffavee Kings of Persia, appointing the chief of the Suddozyes to the command of the Abdaulees."*

So the instrument that made the Durrani settlement did not find a thing to be transferred. It found a relation — a chieftaincy held of a foreign shah, and a set of grazing rights over ground someone else farmed — and it converted that relation into an estate in land. The conversion is the act. The transfer is only its consequence.

What Nadir did first

The conversion was not Ahmad Shah's invention, and this study cannot claim it for him. Nadir performed it in 1738 and Ahmad Shah inherited a going instrument.

On taking Kandahar from the Ghilzai, Nadir converted the province's land to *khalisa* — state land — and then, in Rawlinson's phrase, transferred the rights over the best of it to the Abdali chiefs as *tiyul*, tax-free assignments held against military service. The Alakozai were given the Arghandab; the Alizai the fertile Zamindawar. He summoned some sixty thousand Abdali families back from Khurasan where he had scattered them. And he counted them. Elphinstone reports it as universally asserted that Nadir *"numbered the tribe, when he was fixing their lands and the proportion of men they were to furnish, and found them to consist of sixty thousand families"* — a figure Elphinstone thinks too low, since shepherds are hard to enumerate, but the significant fact is the census itself. A count of households against a quota of horsemen against an allotment of land is not tribal custom. It is a fiscal-military register, of exactly the kind the Ottomans kept for the *timar* and the Mughals for the *mansab*, and it was drawn up by an imperial administration for its own purposes.

Elphinstone states the resulting arrangement in a sentence that saves this study a great deal of argument: *"The whole of their own country had been conquered by Naudir Shauh, and part of it was restored, with a large portion of that of the Ghiljies, on the express condition that they should furnish a horseman for every plough; and the performance of this engagement to the Persian monarch has ever since been exacted by the Afghaun dynasty which has succeeded to his rights and pretensions."*

Read that clause slowly, because four separate things are in it. The country was conquered. *Part* of it was given back — not all. A large slice of somebody else's country, the Ghilzai's, was added to the return. The condition was one mounted man per plough-land. And the Durrani monarchy's claim to go on collecting that service rests, by Elphinstone's account and by its own, on succession to the rights of a Persian shah.

What Ahmad Shah added

Against that inheritance, what did the new order actually distribute? Four things, and it is worth keeping them separate because they behaved differently over time.

Land, on modified terms. Ahmad Shah maintained the Nadirid quota of roughly six thousand Durrani soldiers in his standing army, each assigned the equivalent of one plough — a *kulba* — as *tiyul*. That much was continuity. What he changed was the treatment of a third category of land that Nadir had left loose. Beyond the *tiyul* proper and the *ra'iyyati* lands reserved for the peasantry, there were the *khushk-aba* — the "dry lands" of the Kadani, Dori, Arghastan and Tarnak valleys, uncertain of water, not tied to military service, and taxed lightly at a tenth of produce. Abdali who found the *tiyul* grants too limited for their numbers had begun settling these. Ahmad Shah converted the *khushk-aba* held by the Durrani around Kandahar into *mawrusi* land — hereditary

— and commuted the tithe into an obligation to supply modest quantities of wheat, barley or chaff on the occasions when the Durrani army passed through. That is, functionally, an exemption dressed as a levy: a payment owed only when the recipient is standing in front of you with an army.

The consequence, over the reign, was an enormous transfer. Rawlinson's report describes Durrani chiefs who at first were content to let the native peasantry work their *tiyuls* and who then formed camps and villages of their own people, bought ploughs and took the management in hand; who taxed the peasantry at will and induced many to abandon their land or sell it cheap; who dug new *karez* channels and settled their clansmen on the resulting *nawabad*. By his reckoning over half the *ra'iyyati* land and roughly three-quarters of the crown lands passed to Durrani management, the latter taxed at a third to a half of produce, and the Parsiwan peasantry were reduced to labouring for Durrani proprietors with just enough to subsist on. The Tarnak valley went to the Alakozai, the Arghastan to the Barakzai and Popalzai, the Kadani and Dori to the Achakzai and Nurzai, and little was left for the peasantry. This is the ground-level reality of the settlement and it is not a redistribution among Afghans. It is a dispossession of a non-Afghan cultivating population by an armed pastoral one, conducted over a generation, with the crown's licence and largely without the crown's involvement.

Office. The senior posts of the state went to the men who had backed him, and disproportionately to his own clan and his mother's. Shah Wali Khan of the Salihzai-Bamizai branch of the Popalzai — one of the ten men Ahmad Khan had hand-picked as a junior officer in Mazandaran — became *ashraf al-wuzara*, grand wazir, the highest rank below the throne. Jahan Khan Popalzai became *sardar* and *khan-i khanan*, Khan of Khans. Abdullah Khan of the same clan became *diwan begi*, head of the fiscal council, and accumulated estates in Kandahar, Kabul, Jalalabad, Kashmir and India. Ja'far Khan Popalzai took the slave corps as *qullar-aqasi*. Elphinstone, a generation later, records the resulting convention hardened into rule: the grand wazir *"ought always to be a member of the Baumizye division"* of the Popalzai, and it was from among the Popalzai that most of the great officers of state were chosen by Ahmad Shah. The Barakzai, by far the most numerous clan, got proportionately less, and Rawlinson's registers and Robert Leech's later account agree that the land they got was poorer — "high and dry." Seventy years later the Barakzai took the throne.

Governorship. Provinces went to Durrani *sardars*. Elphinstone describes the arrangement as he found it: a Durrani governor appointed to each division, who *"never resides in his government; but, once a year, goes himself or sends a deputy, with or without a force (according to the necessity of using intimidation), to collect the revenue,"* leaving

the country's regulation the rest of the year to the tribal heads. On the crucial question of tenure he is exact and the exactness is the answer to a question this study was set: *"The Sirdars are removable at pleasure, but it seems usual to keep their offices in particular families."* Removable in law; hereditary in practice.

Plunder. And running under all of it, the flow that made the rest affordable: booty from the campaigns, distributed as titles, jewelled diadems, robes of honour and cash. The chronicle returns to this obsessively — largesse distributed at the accession, largesse distributed after each campaign, largesse to secure allegiance and largesse to restore it after a quarrel. Rawlinson's registers and the chronicle's rhetoric are describing the same machine from two ends.

The consideration

The Field Manual's sharpest single question of any settlement is not what was granted but what was demanded in return, and whether the answer includes armed service. Here the answer is unambiguous, and it is given in the plainest available words by an outside observer with access to the government's own establishment figures.

Elphinstone: *"The Dooraunee clans are obliged to furnish nearly twelve thousand men, as the condition on which they hold their Teeools, or rent-free lands, granted them by Ahmed Shauh and Naudir. In addition to those, they receive three months' pay in the year, when on actual service."* With land and pay together he reckons the whole worth about forty pounds a year to a horseman. The men were called out by royal order to the chief of each clan, who notified the khans under him, who assembled the men owed by their subdivisions; each clan formed a separate corps, a *dasta*, *"subdivided and commanded according to descent, as in the civil arrangement of the clan."*

That is a grant purchasing armed service, and it is the older and more dangerous of the two forms this collection tracks. The modern colonial settlement performs the same transaction with the service clause deleted — land, office and salary in exchange for tax collection and political compliance, while the capacity for organised violence is stripped by the same government in the same decade — and the result is a dependant with a title. The Durrani settlement is the other kind. It left every grantee with a retinue, and it built the chain of command out of the descent structure of the tribe, so that the king's army *was* the sum of his chiefs' contingents and could at any moment become the army that removed him.

Elphinstone saw the defect precisely and wrote it down without dramatics: *"the King is in a great measure dependent on the good will of the Dooraunee chiefs, and is obliged to conciliate that order by bestowing on it a large portion of power and honour,*

though in reality he views it with jealousy, and is continually employed in indirect attempts to undermine it."

The date of the first revolt, which the framework says to look for wherever a co-optation leaves its grantees armed, is 1747. It did not take a generation. It took months.

The marker

Every settlement has a boundary and something that marks it. Here there were three markers, nested, and each did a different job.

The outermost was the name. Ahmad Shah renamed the Abdali "Durrani" after his own regnal epithet and simultaneously *prohibited use of the old name*. The prohibition is attested across several sources; the *Tarikh-i Ahmad Shahi* scrubs "Abdali" even from passages about his own ancestors; and a poem preserved in the *Tarikh-i Shah Wali Khan wazir* records the order with its reasoning — *bi-farmud guyand Durraniyan / wa zan pas na-guyand Abdaliyan*, he commanded they be called Durrani and thenceforth not Abdali — and then supplies the ground: *nadarim ma az nasab iftikhar / bud fakhr-i ma fazl-i parwardigar*, "we take no pride from lineage; our pride is the grace of the Sustainer." A tribal name that predated him was replaced with a name that was a possessive form of his own title. Membership of the settled class was thereafter marked by a word he owned.

Inside that, the clan. Nine clans made up the confederacy in Elphinstone's enumeration, four under Zirak — Popalzai, Alakozai, Barakzai, Achakzai — and five under Panjpao — Nurzai, Alizai, Ishaqzai, Khugiani, Makoo. His household estimates, which he explicitly offers as relative rather than accurate, run: Barakzai around thirty thousand families and Nurzai about the same, Alizai fifteen thousand, Popalzai twelve thousand, Alakozai and Ishaqzai ten thousand each, with Khugiani and Makoo small and landless. What made a man inside was that his clan held allotted land and owed horse.

And innermost, the Sadozai, who were marked by a legal immunity rather than by property. Elphinstone: *"Their persons were sacred, no retaliation nor punishment could be inflicted on any of them, except by a member of their own family; nor could even the head of the Abdaulees himself, pass sentence of death upon a Suddozye."* This is the settlement's constitutional keystone and it should be read for what it actually does. It places the royal lineage outside the reach of the order's own coercive machinery — which protects the king, and equally protects every rival claimant of his blood. A Sadozai prince could not lawfully be executed by the state. He could only be dealt with by his own family. Every succession crisis of the following seventy years runs through that clause.

The counterweight, and the fission

Two features of the settlement were designed against the settlement, and both belong here rather than in a later module, because they were built in from the start.

The first is the *ghulam khana*. Elphinstone gives its establishment at upwards of thirteen thousand men and states plainly that it *"was first formed by Ahmed Shauh, of the different foreigners whom he found established in the Dooraunee country, and of the troops of Naudir's army and other Persians who attached themselves to the Dooraunee government,"* later recruited also from the Tajiks of Kabul, with the Qizilbash forming about a third and reckoned the best of it. Set the two figures side by side: the Durrani clans owed nearly twelve thousand horse; the corps of household troops recruited from men with no tribe in the country stood at over thirteen thousand. The counterweight was larger than the thing it counterweighted. Ahmad Shah's own contemporary usage was more mixed than the later picture suggests — Achakzai and Ishaqzai served among the *qullar* alongside Qizilbash Javanshir — but the instrument was there from the first year, under a Popalzai commander, and it grew.

The second is a piece of deliberate surgery, and Elphinstone reports it without comment as a known fact: *"The Atchikzyes were a branch of the Baurikzyes, but were separated by Ahmed Shauh to reduce the formidable numbers of that clan. They are now under a separate chief, and entirely unconnected with the clan from which they spring."* The largest clan in the confederacy was cut in two by royal act, and a new chieftaincy created to hold the severed portion. This is not a conquest of a foreign people or the co-optation of an alien elite. It is a king cutting up his own tribe because it was too big, and it is the clearest single piece of evidence in the case that the Durrani settlement was administered rather than inherited.

The default question

Run the framework's audit down the chain — *if this arrangement collapsed tomorrow, would this man be better or worse off?* — and the answers do not come out uniform, which is the finding.

The Durrani sardar would be much worse off. He holds rent-free land, a governorship he can farm, a court office, and a share of Indian booty, and he holds all of it because a Sadozai sits on the throne at Kandahar. He will defend the arrangement.

But — and this is the whole of it — he will not necessarily defend the *occupant*. He holds his land heritably, of the crown rather than of any particular king; his contingent answers to him and is organised by his own lineage; his office is removable in law but customary in his family; and there is always another Sadozai available, protected from

execution by the clan's immunity. Elphinstone states the resulting equilibrium exactly and it is the most important sentence in this module: *"the crown would be transferred without a struggle from one member of it to another by a general combination of that tribe."* The settlement bound the Durrani chiefs to the Sadozai *dispensation* and left them free — cheaply, safely, and without any breach of their obligations — to change the man in the chair.

The Qizilbash ghulam would be annihilated. He has no tribe in the country, no allotted land, no clan contingent, and his position exists only because the king wants a body of men with nothing of their own. He will defend the occupant to the last, which is why he was recruited.

The Parsiwan cultivator of the Arghandab would probably be better off, and knew it. The settlement had taken his land, his rate had gone from the Safavid assessment to a third or a half of produce, and his condition by the end of the reign was labouring for a Durrani proprietor on subsistence. Nothing in the arrangement gave him a reason to hold it up.

The Punjabi or Kashmiri peasant was outside the settlement altogether. He was not bought; he was billed. There was no grant to him, no exemption, no office, and no share — only a governor who came once a year with or without a force according to the necessity of using intimidation. Ask the default question of him and the answer is that the order's collapse would cost him nothing he valued.

That distribution of answers is the study's central structural fact and it predicts, before the collapse module is reached, what the collapse will look like. An order whose settlement binds a coherent regional elite to the *dynasty* while binding nobody at all to the *king*, and which extends no settlement whatever to the provinces that pay for it, should be expected to produce exactly three things: a durable core, an evaporating periphery, and an unending sequence of palace wars in which the same families keep changing the same throne. That is the Durrani record from 1772 to 1826, and it is legible in the terms of the grant.

Reading the settlement against the framework

The fiction is recognition, and naming it correctly inverts the standard account. Three families of legal fiction recur in this collection. *Vacancy* declares occupied land empty, and its job is dispossession. *Divisibility* declares a collective holding partible, and its job is manufacturing a market. *Recognition* declares that the grantee already owned what he is being given, and its job is binding an elite.

The Durrani settlement is a recognition fiction and an unusually explicit one. Ahmad Shah's conversion of the *khushk-aba* to hereditary tenure was justified, on

Rawlinson's reading of the registers, by the Durrani's alleged historical ties to those lands — their ancestors having come down from the ancestral highlands of Kaseghar to help expel the Safavids. That historical basis is contradicted by the Durrani's own genealogical tradition, which dates their settlement in Kandahar to a much earlier period, and the whole of the pre-1738 record shows the Abdali as pastoralists and road-guards rather than proprietors. The land was not being restored. It was being granted, and called restored.

The consequence is exactly the one the framework predicts of a grant dressed as a confirmation: a man who does not think he was given something does not think he can be deprived of it. When Timur Shah tried to end his father's tax concessions and assess Durrani proprietors at the same rate as the Parsiwans, the Durrani resisted on the ground that the privileges Ahmad Shah had granted them *were hereditary, since they represented the real source of his power and authority*. That is the fiction speaking back to the state in its own words, one generation after it was written, and it is the reason the standard description of the Durrani order as a tribal confederation exercising its traditional rights has the causation backwards. The rights were made in the 1740s by an administration with a register, and were believed to be ancestral within thirty years. This is the ordinary rate at which a built thing becomes real, and the belief was not therefore false to the men who held it; it was simply younger than they thought.

The heritability question, answered. The seed set this study a specific test: whether the sardars' holdings were heritable in law, in practice, or not at all. The answer is that the settlement ran three tracks at once. Offices were removable at pleasure in law and customary in particular families in practice. *Tiyul* land was a service assignment in law — and the Durrani government, unlike the Habsburg military frontier that Elphinstone compares it to, imposed no requirement of residence and placed no bar on transfer, so that in practice it behaved like property. And the *khushk-aba* were converted to *mawrusi* outright, hereditary in law, on a manufactured ancestral title. **A settlement can be non-heritable in its instrument and heritable in its silences**, and the silences are where to look: not the clause granting the estate but the absent clauses forbidding sale, requiring residence, or reserving reversion on death. Where those are missing, the grant will become property within two generations whatever the instrument says, and the first ruler who tries to collect on the original terms will be told he is confiscating an inheritance.

And a refinement to the default test itself. The framework asks of each man whether he would be better or worse off if the arrangement collapsed, and treats a chain of men who would all be worse off as an order that reproduces itself without a cabal. This case shows the question is underspecified, because it does not distinguish

the arrangement from the incumbent. The Durrani sardar was a reliable defender of the Sadozai settlement and an unreliable defender of any Sadozai king, and the difference was engineered into the grant: heritable land held of the crown rather than of the man, a contingent commanded by descent, an office customary in the family, and a clan immunity that guaranteed a supply of alternative claimants who could not lawfully be killed. **Ask the default question twice — once of the arrangement and once of the occupant — because an order can be extremely stable and its rulers extremely disposable, and the gap between the two answers is where the succession crises live.**

That refinement is offered here to be tested in the modules on elite coordination and on collapse, where the same names will recur.

A note on sources. Mountstuart Elphinstone's *An Account of the Kingdom of Caubul* (first published 1815; quoted here from the two-volume 1839 edition) is in the public domain and is quoted verbatim throughout: on the Safavid patent appointing the Sadozai chief to command the Abdali, on Nadir's census of sixty thousand families, on the conquest and partial restoration of the country on condition of a horseman for every plough, on the twelve thousand men owed as the condition of the *tiyuls* and the three months' pay, on the *sardars* being removable at pleasure but customarily kept in particular families, on the Sadozai immunity from capital punishment, on the establishment of the *ghulam khana*, on the separation of the Achakzai from the Barakzai, on the king's jealousy of the order he must conciliate, and on the crown passing between Sadozai without a struggle by a general combination of the tribe. Elphinstone led the British embassy to Shah Shuja at Peshawar in 1809 and never entered Kandahar; his account of the Durrani country rests on informants and on such official figures as were shown to him, and he says so. He is describing the settlement as it stood some forty years after Ahmad Shah's death and after two decades of civil war, and where he reports a practice the reader should understand a practice of about 1809 with a stated origin in the 1740s.

Henry Rawlinson's "Report on the Dooranee Tribes," compiled around 1841, is the other principal source and the more problematic one. It rests on data taken, in its author's words, from the military register of Ahmad Shah's government, together with land records that can no longer be produced. It supplies the categories of tenure — *tiyul*, *ra'iyyati*, *khushk-aba*, *nawabad*, the *kulba* or plough-land, the conversion of *khushk-aba* to *mawrusi* — and the account of the transfer of peasant and crown land into Durrani hands. It is a colonial administrator's summary of vanished documents, its informants were evidently sympathetic to the dispossessed Parsiwan peasantry, and its conclusions about Ahmad Shah's intentions are contradicted by the chronicle

evidence. It should be treated as unusually valuable and permanently unverifiable, and no proportion in this module derived from it should be read as a measurement.

Modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited. The account of the prohibition of the name "Abdali," the poem from the *Tarikh-i Shah Wali Khan wazir* recording the order, the offices and estates of Shah Wali Khan, Jahan Khan, Abdullah Khan and Ja'far Khan, the composition of the *qullar* under Ahmad Shah as against Timur Shah, the Barakzai grievance over inferior land, and Timur Shah's attempt to tax the Durrani proprietors together with their answer that the privileges were hereditary, all follow Sajjad Nejatie, *The Pearl of Pearls: The Abdali-Durrani Confederacy and Its Transformation under Ahmad Shah, Durr-i Durran* (PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 2017), which also supplies the reading of Rawlinson relied on here and the glossary of tenure terms. Robert Leech's "An Account of the Early Abdalees" (1845) supplies the Alakozai and Alizai land assignments under Nadir and the Barakzai complaint. Ashraf Ghani's "Production and Domination: Afghanistan, 1747–1901" (PhD dissertation, Columbia, 1982) supplies the extent of Abdullah Khan Bamizai's estates.

Contested figures are given as ranges and none should be treated as a count. Elphinstone's clan household numbers are offered by him explicitly to show relative importance and not from any confidence in their accuracy; the total Durrani population he estimates at rather more than half of some eight hundred thousand to a million souls, and he thinks Nadir's sixty thousand families a substantial undercount, putting the figure of his own day at a hundred thousand families. The Durrani cavalry obligation is given at six to seven thousand by Mahmud al-Husayni and twelve thousand by Muhammad Kazim for the Nadirid period, at roughly six thousand in Rawlinson's reading of Ahmad Shah's register, and at nearly twelve thousand by Elphinstone for 1809; these are not necessarily in conflict, since the standing quota and the full call-out were different things, but they cannot be reconciled into a single number. The *ghulam khana* is given by Elphinstone at upwards of thirteen thousand for 1809, and the slave cavalry at Panipat in 1761 at eight to nine thousand. The *kulba* or plough-land is reported in the early Durrani period at approximately three thousand square yards, which is small for the purpose and should be flagged rather than relied upon. Rawlinson's proportions — over half the *ra'iyyati* land and about three-quarters of the crown land passing to Durrani management, at a third to a half of produce — are his estimates from records now lost.

MODULE 3

From the Fish to the Moon

The robe — a coin claiming a mandate straight from God with no intermediary, a king who wrote mystical verse and held an assembly of the learned, an imported relic that was to lie under his own dome, and the chamber that stayed empty

The coin

Begin with the object the order put into the hand of every subject who bought a sack of grain, because it states the claim in fourteen words and states it identically for twenty-five years.

The standard silver rupee and gold *mohur* of Ahmad Shah's reign carry a Persian couplet on the obverse:

> *Hukm shud az Qadir-i bi-chun ba Ahmad Padshah sikka zan bar sim u zar az awj-i mahi ta ba mah*

The command came from the Almighty, the Peerless, to Ahmad the King: strike coin on silver and gold, from the height of the Fish to the Moon. The reverse gives the regnal year and the mint. The Fish and the Moon are a standard Persianate formula for the whole extent of creation — the cosmic fish said to bear the earth at the bottom, the lunar sphere at the top — and the phrase claims a sovereignty bounded by nothing.

What matters more than the reach is the chain of authority, and it is worth being exact about what is *absent* from it. There is no caliph in the couplet. There is no Mughal emperor, though Ahmad Shah's title to Kabul and the Punjab ran through a Mughal cession. There is no Safavid shadow-shah of the kind Nadir had needed and Karim Khan Zand would use. There is no Chinggisid ancestor and no Timurid descent. The command comes from God, directly, to a named man. This is the cheapest possible robe to acquire and the most expensive to make stick, because it borrows from an authority that issues no receipts, and it can only be maintained by a continuous supply of visible evidence that God is in fact commanding this particular man — which is to say, by winning.

The mint names carry their own claim. From regnal year nine, rare pieces read *Dar al-Qarar Qandahar*, the Established Abode. From AH 1171 the definitive form becomes *Ashraf al-Bilad Ahmadshahi* — Most Noble of Cities, Ahmadshahi — the

name of the new capital he built on the Arghandab from 1756, which is to say a city named after himself, described on his own money as the noblest in the world.

And a coda that says as much about the robe's afterlife as the legend does about its intent. Ahmad Shah confirmed Ala Singh, the Jat Sikh chief of Patiala, in possession of Sirhind, gave him the title *Raja-i Rajagan*, King of Kings, and with it the right to strike coin. The Phulkian states went on striking that couplet — the command from the Peerless to Ahmad the King — on their rupees for nearly two centuries, until the Sarhind mint closed in 1948. A Sikh principality, in a country the Durrani lost, kept issuing money bearing an Afghan king's claim to a direct divine mandate for a hundred and eighty years after his death. Robes outlive the men they were cut for, and they do it by becoming furniture.

The name

Durr-i Durran, Pearl of Pearls, is the second element of the robe and the one that reached furthest into everyday life, since it renamed the tribe and thereby the state.

Its meaning has been argued over since Europeans first tried to render it. Henry Raverty, translating Pashto verse in 1862, glossed it flatly as "the Pearl of the Durranis," a name he said the Abdali acquired from wearing pearls in their ears — a folk etymology that requires the tribe to have been Durrani before the name existed, and which cannot be right, but which shows how puzzling the phrase was even to a translator with informants. The plainest political reading is that a man of a minor clan took a regnal epithet with no tribal content whatever and then imposed it on the whole confederacy, so that the collective name became a possessive form of his personal title.

Sajjad Nejatie's argument goes further and is worth taking seriously because it is grounded in what Ahmad Shah actually read and wrote. In the Sufi cosmology he was trained in, the pearl is a standing image for gnosis and for ultimate Reality itself: Ibn al-Arabi represents the First Intellect as a white pearl, and Abd al-Rahman Jami — the great Naqshbandi of Timurid Herat, in the province where Ahmad Shah was raised — titled his treatise on the superiority of Sufi metaphysics *al-Durra al-fakhira*, The Precious Pearl. On this reading the epithet is not a boast about jewellery but a claim to possess the pearl of gnosis, and therefore to be a divinely appointed monarch with access to the Unseen — which is exactly the claim the coin makes, in a different register, for a different audience.

Both readings can be true at once and probably are, which is the ordinary condition of a good regnal title: it says one thing to the tribesman and another to the initiate. What is not in doubt is the coercive edge. Ahmad Shah did not merely add the new name; he *banned the old one*, and the ban is attested across the sources. The court

chronicle removes "Abdali" even from passages about his own ancestors. A poem preserved in the history attributed to his grand wazir records the order and its justification: he commanded they be called Durrani and thenceforth not Abdali, and anyone who said Durrani and Abdali were the same had a head empty of wit — *nadarim ma az nasab iftikhar, bud fakhr-i ma fazl-i parwardigar*, we take no pride from lineage, our pride is the grace of the Sustainer. A separate anecdote has him impose a fine on anyone who used the forbidden word, then use it himself at his father's burial ground and have to buy off the objecting khans with a feast.

Read the couplet and the ban together and they are one instrument. Lineage is demoted; divine favour is promoted; and the tribe's own ancestral name is confiscated and replaced with the king's. A man whose whole claim at Nadirabad had rested on *miras*, inheritance, spent the rest of his reign insisting in verse that lineage confers nothing.

The poet-king

Ahmad Shah is the rare case of an eighteenth-century Asian ruler whose own devotional writing survives in quantity, and the framework's instruction to reconstruct the actual doctrine rather than the category can be followed unusually far here.

He composed a *divan* of odes, predominantly in Pashto with some Persian, and a Persian prose treatise, *Rukn al-yaqin* — The Pillar of Certitude — an allegorical dialogue in which a wayfarer called Padshah, King, questions figures named Soul of the World and Sweet Basil about God, creation, faith and knowledge. His own stated purpose was that the People of the Heart, meaning the Sufis, should benefit from its inner meanings. A commentary by his Master of the Sciences claims for him the rank of *haqq al-yaqin*, the highest degree of certitude in Sufi epistemology. He was an initiate of the Mujaddidi branch of the Naqshbandi order, having become a disciple, with a large body of his commanders, of the *pir* Miyan Muhammad Umar of Chamkani near Peshawar, on the march to the Punjab late in 1747. He appointed a Mujaddidi *pir*, Mulla Idris Khan, as *qazi-yi askar* and Shaykh al-Islam and finally, in 1766, as grand wazir.

And Elphinstone, whose informants had known men who had known him, gives the practice: Ahmad Shah *"was himself a divine and an author, and was always ambitious of the character of a saint,"* and *"treated Moollahs and holy men with great respect, both from policy and inclination."* Raverty adds that he held an assembly of the learned at stated intervals, its first half devoted to divinity and law and its second to science and poetry.

Now the surprising part, and it is a finding rather than a colour detail. Read the verse itself and there is almost no politics in it. Raverty's 1862 selection from the *divan* runs to a dozen odes and they are, without exception, mystical love-lyric in the standard Persianate idiom — Majnun destroyed by the love of Layla, the nightingale and the rose, the anguish of separation, the moth that gains the sun by burning. *Draw near, Ahmad Shah! learn thou love from Majnun!* One poem is a sustained curse on a fly, turned at the last into an exhortation against carnality and pride: *Thou art the servant; then do thou the Almighty seek! Lowliness and humility are the height of perfection for thee.* Another ends *If woe shall afflict, and press upon thee, O Ahmad Shah! In all sincerity and love, flee thou thy God unto.* There is no Afghan nation in these poems, no Delhi, no throne, no tribe, no conquest.

That absence is worth holding, because the most famous verse attributed to Ahmad Shah in modern Afghanistan — the couplet in which he forgets the throne of Delhi when he remembers the mountaintops of his beautiful Pashtunkhwa — does not appear in Raverty's selection, and this study has not been able to verify it against any eighteenth-century text. It may well be authentic and simply unselected; Raverty was choosing for a book about Sufi poetry, not about kingship. But the pattern established in the landscape module counsels caution about a line that is exactly what a twentieth-century national movement would have needed its founder to have written, and it is flagged here rather than used.

The disciplined statement is this. On the deviation test — the only sincerity instrument available at the apex — Ahmad Shah's Sufism reads as genuine. A man arranging a pious front does not compose a technical treatise on gnosis for an audience of Sufis, take initiation with hundreds of his officers, appoint his *pir*'s associate as grand wazir, or write private lyric with no political content in it. But sincere belief and its strategic use are not alternatives, and the same devotion that was real was also the most valuable asset he owned. The verdict is probabilistic and it is: he believed it, and he knew what it was worth.

The audience map

The framework insists that a robe be read audience by audience, and that two inconsistent claims not be called cynicism before checking whether they are addressed to different people. Elphinstone supplies the map from a period source, and it is unusually explicit:

> *"His policy towards the different parts of his dominions was to rely principally on conciliation with the Afghans and Baluchis; with this difference between the*

nations, that he applied himself to the whole people in the first case, and only to the chief in the other. His possessions in Turkistan he kept under by force; but left the Tartar chiefs of the country unremoved, and used them with moderation. The Indian provinces were kept by force alone; and in Khurasan he trusted to the attachment of some chiefs, took hostages from others, and was ready to carry his arms against any who disturbed his plans."

Four registers, four audiences, and the last clause of the third is the one this study has to sit with. *The Indian provinces were kept by force alone.* The Punjab, Kashmir, Sindh and Sirhind — the revenue-producing heart of the empire, the districts whose grain and cash paid for the tax exemptions of Kandahar — received no robe at all. No formation, no legitimating doctrine addressed to them, no attempt at conciliation. A governor came once a year, with or without a force according to the necessity of using intimidation.

The framework's colonial cases predict that a robe will be cut for the population whose belief the order actually needs and withheld from the population it merely contains, and that the tell is the money: force never pays for what it does not need. Ahmad Shah's expenditure on legitimacy was enormous, sustained and entirely directed inward and upward — at the Durrani, at the Kandahari and Peshawari religious classes, and at the wider Sunni world beyond his reach — and it was zero in the provinces that paid for it. That is not hypocrisy. It is arithmetic. Punjabi peasants did not fill his cavalry and could not withhold anything he needed except money, which could be taken.

The Cloak

Which brings us to the most expensive single item of legitimacy in the case, and to the episode that shows what such an item can and cannot buy.

In 1768, in the course of a campaign that brought the Durrani army to the Amu Darya against Bukharan forces advancing on Balkh, Ahmad Shah acquired the *khirqa* — the mantle of the Prophet Muhammad, held in Muslim tradition to be the one physical token brought back from the Night Journey, given by the Prophet to Ali with instructions to pass it to the Yemeni Uways al-Qarani, and thereafter carried by a chain of custody that runs through Baghdad, Bukhara, and (on one account) to Badakhshan around 1697 in the hands of three Dahpidi Sufis stopped at Faizabad by the local ruler.

The provenance of the transfer is genuinely disputed and this study cannot settle it. Jonathan Lee holds that it was surrendered by the Manghit ruler of Bukhara as a term of the peace treaty of 1768 that divided the two powers' spheres along the Amu Darya,

and that European historians of the nineteenth century missed the significance of the clause entirely. Jos Gommans thinks the Badakhshan origin more likely. Robert McChesney weighs both. The Afghan historians split the same way: Fayz Muhammad Katib for Bukhara, Ghubar for Badakhshan. Ahmad Shah's own court chronicler has the relic brought from Badakhshan on the shah's orders, with Shah Wali Khan Bamizai — who had campaigned into Badakhshan and taken Faizabad before turning west to rejoin the main army — tasked with bringing it to Kabul. The two accounts are reconcilable: the Afghans may have taken it as booty from a province nominally Bukharan and then had the transfer formalised in the treaty, which would also explain why Bukhara's famously powerful ulama did not stop it. The name of the Bukharan ruler in the English literature is given variously as Murad Beg, Shah Murad and Mahmud Bi, and since Shah Murad did not rule until 1785 the attribution should not be relied on.

What is not disputed is what Ahmad Shah did with it. McChesney's reading of the significance is the one to hold: with the *khirqa*, the role of champion of Sunni Islam in the eastern Islamic world passed from Bukhara to Kandahar. And the relic's journey south was conducted as a public liturgy of exactly that transfer. It was displayed to crowds at every stage, with the largest gatherings at Kabul and Ghazni; *qadamgah* — stations marking where it had rested — were established along the route; and each day the camel that had carried it was released with a banner round its neck declaring that whoever found the animal might keep it, an itinerant almsgiving that turned the road itself into a charitable act. Shah Wali Khan is said to have dreamt of Ali while guarding it. At Kandahar the custody was settled by a trial: whoever could open the locked box without keys, by saying *Allahu akbar*, would be its warden. The ancestor of the Akhundzada family succeeded, and his descendants have held the office for two hundred and fifty years.

There is also a folk-tale about it that this project ought to enjoy. The custodians at Faizabad, according to local tradition, made the Afghan commander promise not to carry the Cloak past a large stone in the courtyard. He agreed, and then loaded the stone onto one camel and the Cloak onto a second which was made always to follow the first, so that the Cloak never did travel beyond the stone. The stone is still in the shrine complex at Kandahar. It is a story about a legal fiction, told by the people it was used against, and preserved by the people who used it.

The chamber that stayed empty

Ahmad Shah was building his own mausoleum at Kandahar when the Cloak arrived, and the relic was placed provisionally in the mosque beside it while the work

went on. His intention is not a matter of inference. In 1907 the Amir Habibullah visited Kandahar and observed that the inner chamber of Ahmad Shah's tomb had been built to house the relic; the observation is recorded by Fayz Muhammad Katib in the *Siraj al-tawarikh*, along with what had prevented it. The ulama of Kandahar had decreed that the Cloak should remain in the mosque where it had first been placed, and should not be moved at the pleasure of a political leader. Lee's judgement on the episode is that the mantle appears never to have been placed in the mausoleum at all, because the city's ulama opposed the use of so important a relic as a political instrument.

Set that beside everything else in this module and the shape of the thing is plain. The man whose coinage claimed a command from the Peerless Almighty extending from the Fish to the Moon, who had just broken the Maratha confederacy at Panipat, who had renamed a tribe after himself and forbidden the old name on pain of a fine, could not move a piece of cloth thirty yards into a building he had paid for. He was refused by a class of men who commanded no soldiers, held no province, and were in most other respects his clients — several of them literally his appointees.

The refusal was not total, and the settlement reached is more instructive than a clean defeat would have been. The ulama fixed *where* the Cloak stayed. Ahmad Shah fixed that it could not be brought out for display without the consent of the ruler of the day, and that injunction has been honoured ever since: Amanullah in 1929 rallying Kandahar for a failed march on Kabul, a royal order during the cholera of 1935, and Mullah Omar on a rooftop in the spring of 1996, from which he emerged as *Amir al-Mu'minin*. Each side kept the half of the relic it could actually enforce — the ulama the custody, the crown the veto on display — and the division has held for two and a half centuries.

Two further observations before this is read against the framework. The first is the date. 1768 is also the year Ahmad Shah suffered the riding accident at Kabul that produced the ulcer of the nose which killed him four years later. The relic, the mausoleum, and the appanages he distributed among his sons all belong to the same short period: a dying man assembling what he could leave behind. Timur Shah inherited a shrine his father had failed to move.

The second is the tomb itself, and what its inscription says. The verses in white on lapis tile round the cornices praise a king of high rank equal to Khusrau in the management of his government, before whose glory the lioness suckled the stag, whose dagger's tongue delivered a thousand reproofs into the ears of his enemies. The register is entirely Persianate imperial — a Sasanian king of kings as the standard of comparison, the lion and the stag as the standard image of a justice so overwhelming

that predation stops. There is nothing Pashtun in it and nothing tribal. On the building where a Pashtun founder is buried, the language of the robe is the language of the empire he replaced.

Reading the robe against the framework

The robe was cut inward and upward, and its cost is the measure of its audience. The revealed-preference test asks whether an apex holding uncontested force pays a real, avoidable price for legitimacy it does not structurally need, and treats the expenditure as evidence that some audience required it. Ahmad Shah's expenditure was extraordinary — a clause in a peace treaty, a military expedition, a year of processional display with daily almsgiving, a purpose-built chamber in his own tomb, a lifetime of patronage to Naqshbandi *pirs*, a grand wazirate handed to a *pir*, and a personal literary output in two languages. He spent it in Kandahar, Peshawar and along the road from Badakhshan. He spent none of it in Lahore or Srinagar, which were kept, in Elphinstone's phrase, by force alone. The audience for the robe was the population whose belief he could not do without — the armed, mobile, exemption-holding Durrani, and the religious classes who could unmake a claim by declining to bless it — and it was withheld from the population that merely paid.

The refinement this module contributes: an anchor can be acquired without being captured, because the object transfers and the interpretive authority does not. This is the case's sharpest single lesson and it is documented to an unusual degree.

The framework already holds that legitimacy is always borrowed from an audience's own currency, and that the trusted-information position is structural — never created, never abolished, only occupied or captured. What the Cloak episode adds is the mechanism by which a conqueror's attempt to *shortcut* that borrowing fails. Ahmad Shah did not try to persuade the ulama; he tried to buy the thing they interpreted, on the reasonable theory that possession of the most potent object in the eastern Islamic world would confer the authority attached to it. It did not, and the reason is structural rather than accidental: **a relic's power is not in the cloth but in the class that authenticates it, houses it, decides when it may be seen and pronounces on what it means, and that class cannot be transferred with the object because it is not part of the object.** He bought the anchor and found the anchor-holders were a separate purchase, not for sale, and already in place.

The stable outcome is worth stating as a general form, since it is likely to recur: **where a ruler imports an anchor into a country with an established interpretive class, expect a division of the thing rather than a capture of it — the clergy keeping custody and doctrine, the crown keeping access and display — and expect**

that division to prove more durable than either party's original claim. The Kandahar arrangement outlasted the Sadozai, the Barakzai, the monarchy and the republic.

And a note the framework's discipline requires. It would be easy to read this module as the story of a cynic assembling instruments, and the reading would be wrong in a way that matters. The coin's claim of a direct divine command was almost certainly believed by the man who struck it; the *Rukn al-yaqin* is not a document produced by someone managing an impression; the Cloak was, to Ahmad Shah as to the crowds at Ghazni, a real object with real power. That the same items were also the most valuable political assets available does not make them a performance. It makes them the ordinary case: a ruler who believes what his audience believes is the cheapest ruler to legitimate, because he does not have to remember to keep saying it. The cynicism, where it appears in this module, is located precisely and narrowly — in a chamber built to put a prophet's mantle over a king's body, which is an attempt to convert an inherited sanctity into a dynastic one, and which the men who guarded the sanctity recognised for exactly what it was and refused.

A note on sources. The coin couplet — *Hukm shud az Qadir-i bi-chun ba Ahmad Padshah / sikka zan bar sim u zar az awj-i mahi ta ba mah* — is given as it appears on surviving Durrani rupees and mohurs and is attested across the numismatic literature and auction records; the standard catalogue is R. B. Whitehead, *Catalogue of Coins in the Punjab Museum, Lahore*, vol. 3, *Coins of Nadir Shah and the Durrani Dynasty* (Oxford, 1934), which has not been consulted directly here. The mint forms *Dar al-Qarar Qandahar* and *Ashraf al-Bilad Ahmadshahi*, the regnal-year sequence, and the grant of coining rights to Ala Singh with the title *Raja-i Rajagan* are from the numismatic literature on the Kandahar and Sarhind mints. The English rendering of the couplet is this study's own.

Mountstuart Elphinstone's *An Account of the Kingdom of Caubul* (1815; quoted from the 1839 edition) is public domain and is quoted verbatim for the four-register policy toward Afghans, Baluchis, Turkistan, India and Khurasan, and for Ahmad Shah as a divine and an author ambitious of the character of a saint. Henry Raverty's *Selections from the Poetry of the Afghans* (1862) is public domain and is the source for the odes quoted, for the *majlis-i ulama*, and for the "pearls in the ears" etymology of *Durr-i Durran*; his translations are literal and his selection was made for a volume on Sufi poetry, which should be borne in mind when reading the absence of political content in it. The couplet on lineage from the *Tarikh-i Shah Wali Khan wazir* is given in transliteration with this study's own rendering. The mausoleum inscription is paraphrased from the published English translation and not quoted.

Modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited. The esoteric reading of *Durr-i Durran*, the account of the *Rukn al-yaqin*, the Mujaddidi-Naqshbandi affiliations and the career of Mulla Idris Khan, and the evidence for the prohibition of the name "Abdali," follow Sajjad Nejatie, *The Pearl of Pearls* (PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 2017). The account of the Cloak follows Bette Dam and Fabrizio Foschini, "Under the Cloak of History: The Kherqa-ye Sharif from Faizabad to Kandahar" (Afghanistan Analysts Network, 2014), which surveys the competing provenances and supplies the procession detail, the custodianship trial, the boundary-stone tale, and the report from the *Siraj al-tawarikh* of Amir Habibullah's 1907 observation about the inner chamber; and Jonathan L. Lee, *The 'Ancient Supremacy': Bukhara, Afghanistan and the Battle for Balkh, 1731–1901* (Leiden, 1996), for the treaty reading and for the judgement that the mantle was never placed in the mausoleum because the ulama opposed its political use. Robert McChesney's *Waqf in Central Asia* weighs both provenances and supplies the argument about the championship of Sunni Islam passing from Bukhara to Kandahar. A late eighteenth-century history of the Cloak by Miyan Faqirullah Shikarpuri, a Naqshbandi *khalifa* at Kandahar, survives in his *Maktubat* and is the earliest connected account; it has not been consulted directly here.

Contested points are flagged rather than resolved. The provenance of the Cloak is unsettled between Bukhara and Badakhshan and the two are not mutually exclusive; the name of the Bukharan ruler who is said to have surrendered it is given variously in the literature and is unreliable, since Shah Murad did not rule Bukhara until 1785. The etymology of *Durr-i Durran* has at least three readings and this module gives all three without choosing. The verse in which Ahmad Shah forgoes the throne of Delhi for the mountains of Pashtunkhwa is not in Raverty's selection and has not been verified here against any eighteenth-century text; it is flagged and not used. The date of Ahmad Shah's death is disputed: the court chronicle gives 2 Rabi' I 1186, which is 4 June 1772, while most English accounts give 16 or 23 October 1772; the tomb inscription confirms only the year 1186 of the Hijra, which spans both.

MODULE 4

Singh Is Their Title

Formation — the four systems already installing a world in the children of Kandahar, the one the king did not build and could not override, and the counter-formation his own army spent twenty years supplying with martyrs

The premise, stated correctly

Formation is not propaganda and it is not a priestly trick performed weekly on credulous adults. It is the process by which a child is given the framework through which he will afterwards see everything: which persons are his people, which authorities are legitimate, which claims are sacred and therefore not to be weighed, what the story of his kind is, and — the item that does most of the political work — who counts as a trustworthy source of information about the things he cannot check for himself. It works because it arrives before the vigilance that would screen it, and because a life then gets built on top of it, so that in adulthood it is defended not as a proposition that might be revised but as the ground of the self.

From which follows the fact that organises this module: **there is no unformed person.** A population cannot be left blank. If a ruler declines to form the people under him, they are formed anyway, by whatever was already running — and what was already running does not become weaker for his neglect. It holds the field.

The seed for this study guessed that Module 4 would be thin, and that the thinness would be the finding. The guess is half right. Ahmad Shah built almost no formative institutions, which is a real and important fact. But the module is not thin, because the formations he did not build were the most powerful forces in his reign, one of them was running steadily against his own crown, and another he spent twenty years manufacturing by accident.

What was already installing a world

Four systems were forming children in the Durrani lands in 1747, and none of them was new.

The mullah and the mosque. The elementary religious school attached to a village mosque was the ordinary first institution a boy encountered, and its curriculum was the Qur'an — recitation, memorisation, the letters — taught by a man whose authority came from the text and not from any state. Islam in this country was seven or eight

centuries deep by 1747, and at that depth what it installs is not a set of claims a person holds but the medium in which he holds everything. A child learned the prayer before he could evaluate it, learned that the mullah was the person who knew what God required, and learned that this was simply how the world was arranged. Elphinstone found the resulting deference still governing legal life a lifetime later: the *qazi*'s orders in the towns, he wrote, *"are never disobeyed, it being reckoned impious to refuse to conform to the Shirra"* — and where they were resisted it was the *sardar*'s duty to enforce them, which is to say the state's coercive arm serving a judgement made under an authority the state did not own.

The genealogy, and who a boy learns his leader is. This is the item most easily missed and it is the one that mattered most. A Pashtun boy was taught his *nasab* — his descent, by name, through the branchings of *khel* and *zai* up to the clan and the confederacy. That recitation is not antiquarianism. It is a political education, because it tells him precisely which man is his *khan* and why, and the answer is always the same: the head of his own descent group, by inheritance. Elphinstone describes the resulting government as a nested system of assemblies in which each level's chief was the head of the corresponding branch, and adds the detail that makes it a formation rather than an arrangement: the whole thing was *"subdivided and commanded according to descent, as in the civil arrangement of the clan."* A Durrani boy grew up knowing whose banner he would ride under, and he knew it the way he knew his own name, because it *was* his name.

Alongside the genealogy came the conduct code, *pashtunwali* — the obligations of hospitality, of asylum granted to a suppliant, of vengeance, and of the honour of one's women — enforced not by courts but by shame and by the certainty of what neighbours would say. Elphinstone notes that even the *sharia* as administered in the Durrani towns was *"modified by certain acknowledged parts of the Pooshtoonwullee, or customary law."* This is a sacred-value system in the exact technical sense: a set of commitments held beyond calculation, whose violation produces not a re-weighing but revulsion. It had been installed in every generation for as long as anyone could say.

The calendar. Two of them ran at once, and both scored the year without any state's help. The Islamic ritual cycle gave Ramadan, the two Eids, the pilgrimage season, the mourning of Muharram — this last a fault line, since it belonged to the Shi'a Qizilbash of the household troops and the Hazaras of the highlands rather than to the Sunni Durrani. Underneath it ran the pastoral year, which for a large part of the confederacy was the more governing of the two: the move up to summer pasture in the spring and back to winter quarters in the autumn, the lambing, the two shearings. Elphinstone watched it and recorded that the moving tribes north of Kandahar

wintered in the plains and went to the hills in summer, while those to the south took refuge from the heat in the hills of Toba, their marches never exceeding five or six miles a day. A child raised inside that rhythm learns that the year belongs to the flock and the pasture, and that the people he moves with are his people.

The Sufi chain. And laid over all of it, the *pir* and his *murids* — a relation of spiritual discipleship that installed a specific, named chain of trustworthy authority running from a living master back through a documented lineage to the Prophet. Ahmad Shah himself entered one of these in 1747, taking initiation with Miyan Muhammad Umar of Chamkani along with a large body of his commanders. It is worth registering what that means structurally: the king of the country became the disciple of a village *pir* near Peshawar. The formation ran upward through him, not downward from him.

What the king built

Against those four, the record of Ahmad Shah's own formative construction is genuinely slight, and the slightness is a finding.

He founded no system of schools. He installed no new doctrine and issued no catechism. He did not alter the calendar. He created no ritual of the state through which subjects passed. He wrote a mystical treatise for an audience of Sufis and a *divan* of love-lyric, neither of which was addressed to a population. He built a capital and named it after himself, and he built a shrine and a tomb — the Khirqa complex at Kandahar did come to include a madrasa — but a shrine is a site of devotion, not an engine of formation, and it formed nobody who was not already formed to venerate the Prophet's mantle.

What he did instead was *plug in*. He patronised Naqshbandi *pirs* lavishly and appointed them to office: Mulla Idris Khan as *qazi-yi askar* and Shaykh al-Islam and finally, in 1766, as grand wazir; his brother Mulla Fayz Allah as religious tutor to the crown prince Timur. He held an assembly of the learned at regular intervals. He was, in Elphinstone's phrase, *"always ambitious of the character of a saint."*

Every one of those moves is a purchase of the *interpretive* class — the men who occupy the trusted-information position at the top. None of them is formation. Buying the *ulama* gets a ruler favourable rulings and the appearance of sanction; it does not change what is installed in a child at six, because the man doing the installing is a village mullah teaching a text that predates the dynasty by eight hundred years and will outlast it.

And this was, on its own terms, rational. He had no need to build a formation, because the one already running legitimated precisely the kind of authority he was

claiming: a Sunni Muslim king of noble lineage who fought the enemies of the faith and honoured holy men. The framework's rule that a robe is always borrowed from an audience's existing currency was satisfied here more cheaply than in almost any case in this collection. He did not have to make the belief. It was there.

The bill arrives in two places.

The formation he could not override

The first is at the centre of his own power base, and Elphinstone documents it with a precision that leaves nothing to infer.

Ahmad Shah held, in law, the power to appoint the *sardars* of the Durrani clans. He used it. And what happened when he used it against the descent order is the single clearest instance in this collection of a formation defeating a sovereign's writ:

> *"though the King has been known to exercise the power of nominating men not descended from the head family to be Sirdars, and even of appointing a man of one clan to be Sirdar of another; yet in these cases he seems to have pushed his authority further than the Dooraunees were willing to submit to: chiefs so appointed were obeyed with reluctance, and the clan waited impatiently for a rebellion, headed by a Suddozye, to throw off their new chief, and the King who appointed him, and to receive their hereditary Khaun with open arms."*

The king could issue the order. The order did not take, because every man in the clan had been formed since childhood to know who his chief was, and the answer was fixed by descent and could not be altered by a decree. Elphinstone adds the gradient, which is exactly the gradient a formation model predicts: the clans near Kandahar looked most to the king; those in remote country, the Nurzai and the Achakzai, were more attached to their *sardars*. Proximity to the court thinned the tribal formation. Distance left it intact.

Set this beside what the settlement module found and the two mechanisms converge on one result. The grant made the Durrani chief a reliable defender of the Sadozai *dispensation* and an unreliable defender of any particular Sadozai *king*, because he held heritable land of the crown, commanded his own contingent, and had a protected supply of alternative princes. Formation produced the identical split from the other direction: it taught every Durrani boy that the Sadozai were the royal house — Elphinstone notes the veneration in which the Durrani held that family, and that the crown *"would be transferred without a struggle from one member of it to another by a general combination of that tribe"* — while teaching him in the same breath that his own commander was his hereditary khan and not the king's appointee. Loyalty to the

dynasty and resistance to the sovereign were installed in the same childhood, by the same recitation.

An order can carry that for a generation if the man at the top is winning and paying. It cannot carry it through a disputed succession, and after 1772 it did not.

Two names

The second bill came due in the Punjab, and the clearest way to see it is to set two acts of naming side by side, because both rulers understood that a name given is a membership installed.

Ahmad Shah renamed his confederacy. He replaced "Abdali" with "Durrani," a possessive form of his own regnal epithet, and he banned the old name — attested across the sources, with a fine imposed on anyone who used it, intentionally or not, and the court chronicle scrubbing the word even from passages about his own ancestors. It was a serious attempt to reconstitute a collective identity around himself.

It was also an act of legislation directed at adults, enforced by penalty, and it worked to exactly the degree such things work. The name stuck — the Durrani are Durrani to this day — but the thing underneath it did not change at all. The clans kept their descent order, their internal jirgas, their hereditary khans and their pasture. A Durrani boy in 1790 was formed by precisely the system that had formed an Abdali boy in 1730, under a new label. Nejatie notes that the prohibition was never fully successful even in Ahmad Shah's lifetime and that his successors did not maintain it. You can decree a word. You cannot decree the thing a word is supposed to carry, because that is installed elsewhere, earlier, by people who do not work for you.

Now the other name. Sixty years before Panipat, in 1699, Guru Gobind Singh had instituted at Anandpur the initiation of the double-edged sword, at which the initiate received the five articles of the *rahit*, took on obligations enforceable by the community, and received a new name: **Singh**, lion. That is not a decree. It is an initiation rite conferring a marked membership, with a conduct code attached, a founding narrative behind it, a sacred centre at Amritsar, and a collective assembly — the *sarbat khalsa*, meeting at the shrine, resolving by *gurmata* — through which the whole body acted. It reached children through households, through the *rahit* observed daily and visibly, and through a martyrology recited to them. It possessed, in short, all five of the levers at once: a marked legitimate authority, a coalition whose belonging was the whole of one's standing, a set of commitments placed beyond calculation, a story of the founders, and installation early enough that no vigilance had yet matured to screen it.

By 1745 the *jathas* had reorganised at Amritsar into twenty-five bands of about a hundred horse; by March 1748 there were sixty-five; on Baisakhi, 29 March 1748 — ten weeks after Ahmad Shah first crossed the Indus — they combined into the Dal Khalsa. From 1753 they ran the *rakhi* system, taking a fifth of a village's revenue in exchange for protection, which is to say they had begun to govern.

The Qazi's chapter

The best evidence that this was a formation and not merely an insurgency comes from the one place a historian would least expect to find praise of it: an eyewitness account written by a Muslim judge riding with the invading army, for the purpose of glorifying the invasion.

Qazi Nur Muhammad of Ganjaba accompanied Mir Nasir Khan of Kalat and his Baluch contingent on Ahmad Shah's seventh invasion, in the winter of 1764–65, and completed his *Jangnama* — a Persian verse account in fifty-five sections — in about June 1765. It is the only substantial account of that campaign. Its author calls the Sikhs dogs, infidels and idolaters on nearly every page, and he was writing to be paid.

And he devotes an entire section to their qualities, in terms that read as a formation manual compiled by an enemy. He instructs his readers not to call them dogs, because they are lions, and that anyone wishing to learn the art of war should learn it from them. He explains the name — "Singh is their title, a form of address for them" — and glosses it as lion, because his audience would not know. He describes the feigned retreat as a deliberate tactic rather than a rout. And then, at length and evidently against his own inclination, he describes the conduct code: that they will not kill a man fleeing the field; that they do not rob women of wealth or ornaments, rich or poor alike; that there is no adultery among them and no theft; that they address any woman, young or old, as *burhi*, an old lady. Finally he explains the religion for a reader who will not know it — that they follow the Guru who lived at Chak, that the path was laid down by Nanak, that from Guru Gobind Singh they received the title Singh, and that they are not Hindus but a separate people with a religion of their own. He closes by noting that they have divided the Punjab among themselves and given a share to every man, young and old.

Read that as what it is. A hostile chronicler, forty years before the Sikh state, has identified for his readers a marked name conferring membership, a founder narrative with a named succession, a conduct code observed under conditions where nobody could enforce it but themselves, a separate collective identity distinguished from every neighbouring one, and a distribution of land to the whole body rather than to a chiefly class. He is describing the five levers from the outside, and the reason he is describing

them is that his own side needed to understand what they were fighting, because they could not beat it.

The framework says a robe is genuinely load-bearing when it produces conduct that would not otherwise occur, and that the surest evidence is behaviour under conditions where defection is unobserved and costless. An enemy's testimony that these men do not loot women or kill fugitives, offered by a man who wants his readers to hate them, is about as strong as that evidence ever gets in an eighteenth-century source.

Amritsar

Ahmad Shah understood what he was facing better than he is usually credited with, and the proof is where he aimed.

He went for the shrine. In 1757 the Harimandir at Amritsar was attacked and the sacred tank defiled; the aged Baba Deep Singh died in the attempt to reach it, and the manner of his death entered Sikh memory as an image reproduced ever since. In 1762, in the course of the sixth invasion, the temple was blown up and the tank filled, after the campaign that Sikh tradition records as the *Vadda Ghallughara*, the Great Massacre — 5 and 6 February 1762 at Kup Rahira near Malerkotla, where the Afghan cavalry caught a column of Sikhs encumbered with their families and killed, on estimates that range from about five thousand to as many as fifty thousand with most authorities between twenty-five and thirty thousand, a very large proportion of them non-combatants. In December 1764, during the seventh invasion, a party recorded at about thirty Sikhs under Baba Gurbakhsh Singh stood against the army at Amritsar and was killed to the last man — an episode preserved, again, in the account of a chronicler who was riding with the army that killed them.

The targeting was correct in its diagnosis and catastrophic in its effect. Amritsar was the formation's physical centre; destroying it should, on a certain theory of belief, have destroyed the belief. What happened instead is what the framework predicts and this case demonstrates at unusual scale: **force applied to a formation is not a solvent but an input.** A conduct code held as sacred converts violence against its holders into martyrdom, and martyrdom is the highest-value material a formation of that kind can receive, because it supplies exactly what the sacred-value lever runs on — proof that the commitment is not tradeable, delivered by the enemy. Each demolition of the Harimandir produced a rebuilding and a name; each massacre produced a *ghallughara* to be recited to children. The Sikhs took Sirhind in January 1764, took Lahore from the Durrani governor's nephew in April 1765, and by the end of the century held the Punjab that Ahmad Shah had spent nine invasions failing to keep.

There is one further thing to say about this, and it is a hard one. The Vadda Ghallughara was not incidental damage in a campaign against an army. The column caught at Kup was moving families to safety and the great majority of the dead were women, children and the old. Nothing in the analysis above softens that, and the analytical point — that the killing was formatively productive for the people it was inflicted upon — must not be allowed to function as a consolation. It is a statement about why the policy failed on its own terms, offered alongside and not instead of the fact that tens of thousands of non-combatants were killed in two days.

The provinces where nothing was installed

Beyond the Sikh case, the general pattern in the eastern provinces is simply absence, and the framework's colonial cases have taught this collection what absence means.

Elphinstone's summary of the reign is the evidence: conciliation applied to the whole people among the Afghans and to the chiefs only among the Baluchis; Turkistan held by force with its Tartar chiefs left in place and used with moderation; Khorasan held by a mixture of attachment, hostages and the threat of arms; and *"the Indian provinces were kept by force alone."*

Force alone means no formation was attempted. And no formation attempted does not mean a population with an empty field; it means a population whose existing formations — Sikh, Hindu, Indian Muslim, in the Doab and the Punjab and Kashmir — went on running undisturbed, funded nothing of the Durrani order, and owed it nothing. When the Durrani grip loosened after 1772 there was no constituency anywhere east of the Indus with a formed reason to hold the arrangement up, and it went in under twenty years.

The reason it was never attempted is the same reason found in the colonial cases, and it is worth naming plainly rather than treating as neglect. To form the Punjab into the Durrani order would have meant admitting the Punjab into it — into the exemptions, the *tiyuls*, the offices, the share of plunder that the whole settlement consisted of. The settlement had a fixed size and its recipients were already fighting over it. There was nothing to admit anyone to. The provinces were what paid for the settlement; they could not also be inside it.

Reading formation against the framework

Confirmation, on new evidence, of a finding the corpus banked elsewhere: a withheld formation is not an absent formation but an outsourced one. The Durrani state formed nobody it did not already have, and every field it declined to enter

was occupied — in the Durrani heartland by the descent order and *pashtunwali*, in the highlands by Shi'a and Hazara traditions the state never touched, and in the Punjab by a formation that grew stronger every year of the occupation. The corpus had this from a case where a colonial power capped education below belief because forming the ruled would have meant admitting them. This case supplies the same mechanism without a colonial frame anywhere near it, in a Muslim conqueror ruling Muslim and non-Muslim subjects in the eighteenth century, which is worth having, since it establishes that the mechanism is structural and not a feature of European empire.

The refinement this module contributes: force applied to a formation is an input to it, not a solvent, and the harder it is applied the more it supplies. A conqueror who correctly identifies the formative centre of a rival order and destroys it has not solved the problem; he has fed it. The shrine can be demolished — the Harimandir was, more than once — but the formation is not in the building. It is in the children, and the demolition becomes the story the children are formed on. The general form, offered for testing: **the only thing that dissolves a formation is a competing formation, which requires admitting people; where a ruler cannot afford to admit them, he cannot dissolve their formation, and every coercive measure he takes against it will raise its value to its holders.** The tell to look for is a rising body-count against a rising, not a falling, cohesion in the target — which is precisely the sequence from 1757 to 1765, ending with a hostile chronicler explaining the enemy's excellence to his own side because his own side had to be warned.

And an accumulation rather than a new claim. The split this study found in the settlement — an elite bound to the dispensation and not to the occupant — turns out to have a second, independent source in formation. The grant gave the Durrani sardar heritable land, his own contingent and a protected supply of alternative princes. The formation gave every Durrani boy a hereditary khan who was not the king, and a royal house that was. Two mechanisms, working in different registers, producing one result: a core that would fight for the Sadozai and would not obey a Sadozai's appointment. When a study finds the same fault line arriving twice by different routes, the finding is firmer than either route alone, and the collapse module will not need to argue for it again.

A note on sources. Mountstuart Elphinstone's *An Account of the Kingdom of Caubul* (1815; quoted from the 1839 edition) is public domain and is quoted verbatim on the impiety of refusing the *sharia*, on *pashtunwali* modifying it in practice, on the descent-based subdivision of the clan contingents, on the pastoral year and the migrations to Toba, on the reluctance with which royally appointed *sardars* were obeyed and the clans' preference for a rebellion headed by a Sadozai, on the gradient of

attachment between clans near Kandahar and those remote from it, on the crown passing between Sadozai by a general combination of the tribe, and on the four-register policy toward the Afghans, Baluchis, Turkistan, Khorasan and India. He describes the order of about 1809, some forty years after Ahmad Shah's death, on the evidence of informants; where he reports a formative practice, the reader should take it as a practice of his own day whose antiquity he assumed rather than demonstrated.

Qazi Nur Muhammad's *Jangnama*, completed about June 1765, is the eyewitness Persian verse account of the seventh invasion and the only substantial source for it; the author was a *qazi* attached to Mir Nasir Khan of Kalat and wrote to glorify the expedition, calling the Sikhs dogs and infidels throughout, which is precisely what makes his section on their conduct evidentially valuable. The Persian text was edited with an English summary by Ganda Singh and published by the Sikh Historical Research Department, Khalsa College, Amritsar, in 1939, from a transcript made by Karam Singh of a manuscript then at Quetta; the single short quotation given here is from that translation and the remainder of the section is paraphrased. The text should be read as source-critically as any court chronicle: its praise of the Sikhs is not disinterested either, since a formidable enemy makes a more glorious victory.

Modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited. The account of the prohibition of the name "Abdali," its incomplete enforcement, and Ahmad Shah's Naqshbandi initiation and religious appointments — Miyan Muhammad Umar of Chamkani, Mulla Idris Khan, Mulla Fayz Allah Dawlatshahi — follows Sajjad Nejatie, *The Pearl of Pearls* (PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 2017). The chronology of the Sikh *jathas*, the Dal Khalsa of 29 March 1748 and the *rakhi* system of 1753 follows the standard Sikh historiography, which derives ultimately from Ganda Singh and Hari Ram Gupta and should be understood as a tradition with its own commitments.

Contested figures are given as ranges. The dead at Kup Rahira on 5–6 February 1762 are estimated across the literature at between about five thousand and fifty thousand, with most authorities between twenty-five and thirty thousand and with agreement that a large majority were non-combatants; no contemporary count exists and the figures are irreconcilable. The number who died with Baba Gurbakhsh Singh at Amritsar in December 1764 is given as about thirty in the tradition and is not independently attested. The date of the institution of the *khalsa* initiation is given as Baisakhi 1699 on the strength of Sikh tradition; the historicity of the details of that occasion has its own scholarly literature, which this study has not entered.

MODULE 5

One-Fifth, Twice a Year

The cost column — why the ordinary man complied, priced group by group; and what happened in the province where the sovereign's own army was the principal danger and a competitor appeared offering the thing a state is supposed to sell

Six ledgers, not one

The question this module asks is the plainest one in the framework and the easiest to answer badly: why did the ordinary man go along with it?

He is weighing something. On one side, what compliance costs him — the share of his crop, the labour he must give, the sons who must ride. On the other, what it buys him — protection from worse, access to land, a share of plunder, a court that will hear him, a road that is safe. And running underneath both, two things that can substitute for either: a belief that the arrangement is *right*, which makes compliance cheap because it is not experienced as compliance at all; and a credible threat, which makes defiance expensive whatever he believes. Where belief is thin and benefit is thin, the state must supply the difference in force. And behind all of it sits the exit question — whether he can simply go somewhere better — because a subject who can leave sets a ceiling on what can be taken from him, and one who cannot has no ceiling but starvation.

The mistake to avoid here is treating "the common man" of the Durrani empire as one person. He was at least six, and their ledgers do not merely differ in degree; they run in opposite directions. One of them was among the best-treated ordinary men in eighteenth-century Asia. Another was worked to subsistence by a landlord who had arrived in his valley within living memory. A third was raided by the same army nine times in twenty years and eventually bought protection from somebody else.

The Durrani tribesman

Start with the man the whole order was built to satisfy, because his ledger explains everyone else's.

An ordinary Durrani householder in the Kandahar country after 1747 held land, and he held it on terms that were, by the standards of the age, extraordinary. If he was one of the roughly six thousand assigned a plough-land as *tiyul* he paid no land revenue at all; the assignment was in lieu of pay. If he held *khushk-aba* in the drier valleys he

had, after Ahmad Shah's conversion of that category, hereditary tenure and owed not the old tithe but modest quantities of wheat, barley or chaff, delivered when the army happened to pass through — an obligation that fell due perhaps a few times in a lifetime. On campaign he drew three months' pay a year on top of the land; Elphinstone reckons land and pay together at something like forty pounds a year, of which the cash was about a quarter.

Against that he owed service — one horseman per plough, in a contingent commanded by his own kinsmen, under a chief of his own descent. And he had a share, direct or trickled, in the plunder of nine Indian campaigns.

What he got beyond the money is at least as important. Over the reign, men of his clan moved from herding into landowning: buying ploughs, taking the management of the *tiyul* lands in hand, digging new *karez* channels to bring dry ground into cultivation, and spreading across the valleys and into the peasant and crown lands until, on Rawlinson's reading of the registers, most of the arable land of Kandahar was in Durrani hands. Within a generation an ordinary tribesman had gone from being one of Nadir's conscripted shepherds to being a proprietor.

Now put the two dials on it. Belief: thick — this was his king, of the royal clan his own genealogy told him to venerate, fighting the enemies of a faith he had held since childhood. Benefit: enormous and rising. Cost of defection: from the state, almost nothing, because he had flocks and mountains and the state could not reach him — which is exactly why he was bought rather than compelled. From his own people, however, ruinous: expulsion from the clan, the burning of his house, the end of any standing he had. The coercion that held the Durrani in line was not the shah's; it was his neighbours'.

This is the cheap end of the framework's gradient, and it is worth saying without cynicism: the Durrani tribesman was not fooled and he was not oppressed. He was a beneficiary of an arrangement that had made him rich, and he defended it because it was his.

The Ghilzai

One valley over sat the men who paid for part of it.

Ahmad Shah's first campaign as shah, in the autumn of 1747, was against the Ghilzai at Qalat-i Ghilji and Ghazni. And the land settlement he inherited and extended had, in Elphinstone's exact phrasing, restored to the Abdali part of their own conquered country *"with a large portion of that of the Ghiljies."* The largest Pashtun confederacy in the country, which had ruled Kandahar for twenty-nine years and taken

Isfahan in 1722, was now a subject population on reduced ground, paying revenue where its neighbours paid none, and furnishing no privileged contingent.

Its ledger: no benefit, no exemption, no office worth the name, and a formation that told it exactly who it was and how recently it had been paramount. Its cost of defiance: real but not unlimited, since the Ghilzai were as mobile as the Durrani and held difficult country. Elphinstone, a lifetime later, still describes them as the one Afghan tribe that never took to the monarchy. Raverty puts it more bluntly, calling them a turbulent and unruly sept whom Ahmad Shah had to subdue before he could begin. They complied because they had been beaten in 1747 and because the alternative on offer was worse, not because anything in the arrangement was theirs.

The Parsiwan cultivator

Beneath the Durrani proprietor was the man who actually worked the ground, and his is the classic full cost column.

He was, in Rawlinson's description of the pre-1738 registers, a Parsiwan — a Persian-speaker — or a Hazara, Kakar or Baluchi, and before Nadir he had paid the Safavid assessment to a Safavid governor. Then Nadir made the province *khalisa* and handed the rights over the best of it to Abdali chiefs. Then, across Ahmad Shah's reign, the new proprietors came down off the hills and took the management of the land into their own hands. They taxed the peasantry as they liked, since the crown had given them wide latitude over their holdings; they induced many to abandon their land or sell it cheap; they preferred cultivators from their own tribe and shielded them from the state's demands. On Rawlinson's estimate over half the *ra'iyyati* land and about three-quarters of the crown land passed into Durrani management, assessed at a third to a half of produce, and the old peasantry was reduced to labouring for Durrani landowners and left with just about enough to live on.

Run the ledger. Benefit: none that he did not have before, and a good deal less. Belief: nothing was installed in him at all — he was not Durrani, in some cases not Sunni, and no formation of the new order reached him. Cost of defection: total, and here the mechanism is the one the landscape module identified. His livelihood was the *karez*, an underground channel representing generations of accumulated labour that cannot be carried anywhere. A pastoralist walks away and takes his wealth with him. An irrigator who walks away has abandoned everything he owns. The floor could sit on him with its full weight because he could not stand up under it and could not leave it, and so it did.

Rawlinson's informants clearly sympathised with these people and their bitterness is audible in his report — he notes that Durrani who resented their years of degradation

under Nadir took it out on the peasantry, who dragged out a life of servitude the harder for being unaccustomed to it. That is a partisan framing and should be read as one. But the direction of the transfer is not in doubt, and its shape is exactly what the framework predicts: **the group with no exit and no belief bore the whole of the extraction, and the group that could have walked away bore none of it.**

The highlands, and the places nobody came

Two qualifications keep the picture honest.

The Hazaras of the central massif, Shi'a in a Sunni state and holding country that punished any army entering it, were never brought inside the arrangement and were also never systematically taxed by Ahmad Shah. Elphinstone found them still under their own chiefs at the beginning of the next century. What they had was not liberty exactly — the highlands were poor and the pressure from Pashtun expansion into their pastures was constant and would become far worse in the following century — but for the ordinary Hazara household in Ahmad Shah's reign the empire was mostly a distant rumour.

The same is broadly true of much of the country between the roads. Elphinstone's account of the provinces under Durrani *sardars* describes a governor who *"never resides in his government; but, once a year, goes himself or sends a deputy, with or without a force (according to the necessity of using intimidation), to collect the revenue,"* leaving everything else to the tribal heads. For eleven months of the year the state was not there. That is a real fact about the cost column and cuts both ways: extraction was intermittent and evasion was possible, but so was every other kind of predation, since the same absence that spared a village the tax collector left it to whoever rode up next.

The Punjabi peasant

And now the province that mattered, and the ledger that decided the empire.

The Punjab, Multan, Sirhind and Kashmir were the revenue base. They paid for the exemptions of Kandahar. And what did the cultivator there receive in exchange for his compliance?

Take the standard list of what a state sells a peasant. Protection from invasion: the Durrani army *was* the invasion, nine times between 1748 and 1769, moving through the same districts each time with the same requisitions, the same foraging and the same treatment of a countryside it did not expect to farm again. Protection from disorder: the Punjab in these decades was fought over by Mughal governors, Afghan governors, Sikh *misls*, Maratha detachments and freelance plunderers, and the Durrani governor's

answer, when he came at all, came once a year. Law: a *qazi* in the towns. Relief in famine: nothing recorded. Roads and works: nothing recorded.

Belief: none. The framework's colonial cases establish that an order withholds formation from populations it cannot afford to admit, and this order withheld it completely — kept, in Elphinstone's phrase, *by force alone*. Cost of defection: high in the fortnight the army was in the district, and effectively zero for the rest of the year, because the floor's reach in the Punjab was a function of where the cavalry happened to be standing.

Put those together and the ledger returns a result that ought to be startling and is, on reflection, obvious: **compliance with the Durrani order bought the Punjabi peasant nothing whatever.** Not less than it cost — nothing at all. He was not weighing a bad bargain against revolt. He was being billed by a party that supplied no service.

The competing offer

Which is why what happened next happened, and why it is the sharpest single episode in this module.

From about 1753 the Sikh *misls* began offering *rakhi* — protection. The terms were stated and public: the Dal Khalsa would guarantee a village's persons and property against invasion, against the exactions of *zamindars* and government officials, and against local plunderers, in exchange for a share of the revenue collected twice yearly after the two harvests. The rate ran between an eighth and a half and was usually a fifth. And the sources record that villages, singly and in clusters, *opted* for it.

That verb is the finding. This was not a peasantry rising, and the framework's discipline about not crediting structural change to the rising of the ruled holds here as everywhere. It was a peasantry *switching suppliers* — transferring a portion of its revenue from a sovereign who took and did not protect to an armed body that protected at a published price. The Sikh chroniclers naturally present it as security freely sought; the Afghan side, equally naturally, called it extortion under threat of raid. Both descriptions fit the same object, which is what protection always looks like from the two ends. What matters analytically is that one of the two suppliers was actually delivering the good and the other was the principal threat it protected against.

By 1764 the *misls* took Sirhind; in April 1765 the Bhangi *sardars* took Lahore from the Durrani governor's nephew; and the *rakhi* system dissolved into direct rule because its holders had become the government. The Durrani lost the Punjab not because their army was beaten in the field — it was not, decisively, in Ahmad Shah's lifetime — but

because in the interval between campaigns somebody else was performing the function of a state and being paid a fifth of the revenue for it.

Kashmir

Kashmir deserves separate treatment because it shows the same logic under a lid, where no competing supplier could get in.

The valley was taken in 1752 and held by Durrani governors until 1819. The extraction was extreme and it was not only fiscal. Alongside heavy land revenue came a proliferation of cesses and, worse for an ordinary household, *begar* — forced, unpaid labour, of the kind that takes a man off his own field at the moment his own field needs him. Non-Muslims, and Shi'a Muslims, bore additional disabilities. The historian M. A. Kaw, working on the valley's agrarian system, lists as the causes of a sustained peasant emigration not just the tax rates but the conduct of the state's underlings, the severity of the *begar*, the raids, the natural calamities met without relief, and the fighting among the governors' own officials — leaving, in his reading, no course open to the peasantry but to leave the valley and wander in search of somewhere better.

That is the exit variable operating at the only setting available to a man walled in by mountains: not switching protectors, since none was on offer, but flight. It carries a fearful price — abandoning land, water rights and kin — and its use at scale is the strongest possible statement about what remaining was worth.

And there is a detail from the Kashmiri record that belongs in this module because it is what the cost column looks like from underneath. Peasants protesting the assessment would come before the governor holding a plough aloft with a written petition tied to the top of it. That is a demonstration by people who could not strike, could not vote, could not sue and could not fight: an implement raised over a crowd, saying that the thing which feeds you is the thing you are destroying. It is also, precisely, a *petition* — an appeal to the ruler against his own officials, which is the classic form of protest by people whose framework tells them the sovereign is legitimate and only his servants are wicked.

Two cautions on this section. Most of the worst-documented Kashmiri horrors — the mass killings, the forced conversions, the governors remembered by name for cruelty — belong to the 1780s and 1790s, under Azad Khan and Juma Khan, after Ahmad Shah's death; what belongs to his own reign is the establishment of the extractive machinery and the appointment of the first governors who worked it. And the source literature on Afghan Kashmir is heavily communal in both directions and should be read with that in view. The structural point survives either way: a walled valley with a rich agriculture, no exit but flight, no formation installed, and a governor

purchasing the province's revenue from the crown is the configuration in which extraction runs to the bone.

The captives

One category of person had no ledger at all, and leaving them out would falsify the module.

The Indian campaigns produced captives on a large scale — men, women and children taken in the sack of Delhi in 1757, in the Mathura and Vrindavan country, and above all after Panipat in January 1761, where the Maratha army had been accompanied by something on the order of a hundred thousand non-combatants. Jadunath Sarkar's account, which is the source most later writers follow, gives about twenty-two thousand women and children driven off as slaves after that battle, many of them of high rank; the figure is a nineteenth-century-style estimate from contemporary Indian accounts and should be held loosely. What is not in dispute is that captive-taking was a routine and expected yield of the campaigns, that slaves moved from India into the markets of Kandahar, Kabul and Central Asia, and that the Sikhs' interception of Afghan columns to free captives became one of the acts most celebrated in their own tradition — which tells you both that it happened and that it was worth celebrating.

For these people there is no cost-benefit calculation to reconstruct, because they were not parties to an arrangement. They were the arrangement's product. Any account of the Durrani cost column that prices only the taxed and omits the sold has priced the cheaper half.

What held it up

Pull the six ledgers together and the pattern is unmistakable.

Where belief was thick and benefit was large — the Durrani heartland — the state needed almost no coercion, and had almost none available. What kept a Durrani tribesman in line was his clan, not his king: the certainty that a man who broke with his people would be expelled from them, and that his house might be burned by his own neighbours. This is the framework's cheapest hold, and it is worth noting how much of the coercive work in this order was done by society rather than by the state. Ahmad Shah did not have to pay for it.

Where belief was absent and benefit was absent, compliance was purely a function of the floor's physical reach — and the floor's reach was a horse's reach. In Kandahar province that was enough, because the irrigator could not run. In the Punjab it was not, because the army went home each spring and the reach went with it.

And the two are one arrangement, which is the thing to hold. The Durrani tribesman's exemption *was* the Punjabi peasant's bill. An order that must buy the compliance of its own soldiery, because it cannot compel a population that can disperse, has to find the money from a population that cannot — and the more generously it buys the first, the harder it must press the second. The gentleness at the centre and the ferocity at the edge are not two policies. They are one equation with the terms on opposite sides.

Reading the cost column against the framework

Confirmation of the split floor, now with prices. This study earlier found that where the population supplying the floor can disperse, the floor cannot price its defection and the ruler must buy compliance instead of compelling it. Module 5 supplies the other half of that equation from the ledger side: the purchase was funded by a population that could not disperse, and the rate on the second group is a direct function of the price of the first. Two men in the same empire, one paying nothing and holding hereditary land, the other yielding half his crop and holding nothing, is not an inconsistency in the order. It is the order.

The refinement this module contributes: price the sovereign's product, not only his demand. The framework's cost column asks what defiance costs the subject and locates the stable extraction rate at the edge of the revolt threshold. That is the right question for an order that supplies something. It is the wrong question where the sovereign's own army is the principal recurring danger to the province, because then the subject is not weighing compliance against revolt at all. He is choosing between suppliers of a service, and the sovereign is not one of them.

The general form, offered for testing: **where a state's periodic presence in a province is net-destructive of the security it is nominally selling, no extraction rate is stable, because the constraint is not the revolt threshold but the price of the best available alternative protector.** And the tell to look for is not rebellion. It is a market: villages contracting, at a stated rate, with somebody else. Rebellion is loud and usually loses; a protection market is quiet, is entered into by people who think of themselves as buying peace rather than making war, and transfers a province without a decisive battle. Ahmad Shah won almost every engagement he fought in the Punjab and lost the Punjab, and the instrument that took it from him was a receipt for a fifth of the harvest.

And a note on where the coercion actually came from. In the Durrani heartland the state's coercive apparatus was thin to the point of near-absence — no police, no standing garrisons in the clan country, a governor who visited once a year. It is

tempting to read that as mildness. It was not. The coercion was there in full; it was simply being administered by the clan rather than by the crown, and the framework should register this as a distinct configuration rather than a low reading on a single dial. **Where a conquering apex leaves a naturalised prior order intact and buys its elite rather than replacing it, he acquires its enforcement apparatus for nothing — and pays for it later, because a coercive machinery he did not build is one he cannot redirect.** The same neighbours who would burn a defector's house would not obey a *sardar* the king appointed over their heads. He got the enforcement free and it was never his.

A note on sources. Mountstuart Elphinstone's *An Account of the Kingdom of Caubul* (1815; 1839 edition) is public domain and is quoted verbatim on the restoration of Abdali land together with a large portion of the Ghilzai's on condition of a horseman for every plough, on the *sardar* who never resides in his government and comes once a year with or without a force according to the necessity of using intimidation, and on the Indian provinces being kept by force alone; his estimates of the Durrani horseman's income in land and pay are also his. Henry Raverty's *Selections from the Poetry of the Afghans* (1862) is public domain and supplies the characterisation of the Ghilzai as the exception to Ahmad Shah's conciliation. Both describe the order as it stood a generation or more after Ahmad Shah's death.

Henry Rawlinson's "Report on the Dooranee Tribes" (c. 1841) supplies the account of the pre-1738 peasantry, Nadir's conversion of the land to *khalisa*, the categories of tenure, the sedentarisation of the Durrani and the transfer of *ra'iyyati* and crown land into their hands at a third to a half of produce; it rests on the military register of Ahmad Shah's government and on records that no longer exist, its informants were sympathetic to the dispossessed Parsiwan peasantry, and none of its proportions should be read as a measurement. It is used here through Sajjad Nejatie's summary in *The Pearl of Pearls* (PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 2017).

The *rakhi* system is described from the standard Sikh historiography, ultimately deriving from Ganda Singh and Hari Ram Gupta and codified in the *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*: protection extended by the Dal Khalsa to villages and clusters of villages against invasion, official exaction and plunder, in return for a share of the revenue paid in two instalments after the *rabi* and *kharif* harvests, the rate running from an eighth to a half and usually a fifth, from about 1753 until the *misls* took direct possession in 1764–65. That literature is written from inside the tradition and presents the arrangement as protection freely sought; Afghan accounts present the same transactions as extortion. Both readings are recorded here.

On Kashmir, the material is drawn from the scholarship on the Afghan period, principally M. A. Kaw's work on the agrarian system of the valley, which supplies the list of causes of peasant emigration including the severity of *begar*, and from the survey literature on the 1752–1819 governors. That literature is heavily communal in both directions and much of the worst-attested violence belongs to governors of the 1780s and 1790s, after Ahmad Shah's reign; the periodisation is stated in the text and should be kept in view.

Contested figures are given as ranges or flagged. The captives taken after Panipat are given at about twenty-two thousand women and children on Jadunath Sarkar's estimate, derived from contemporary Indian accounts and not from any count; the non-combatants accompanying the Maratha army are given at around a hundred thousand on the same basis. The Durrani cavalry obligation is given at roughly six thousand on Rawlinson's reading of the register and nearly twelve thousand in Elphinstone's account of 1809. The proportion of Kandahar's arable land in Durrani hands by the end of the reign, and the assessment rates on it, are Rawlinson's estimates from lost documents.

MODULE 6

Two Lakhs from Kandahar

Extraction — a province-by-province revenue list in which the capital yields a fiftieth of the total and Kashmir yields twelve times what the capital does; the accounts kept in an Indian currency; and what survives of the corpus's contrast with Nadir once the arithmetic is on the page

The list

There survives a province-by-province statement of Durrani revenues, compiled by a Bukharan who had spent time at the Afghan court and written up in Persian in the early nineteenth century. It is not a treasury document and it is not from Ahmad Shah's own reign; its compiler, Abd al-Karim of Bukhara, was describing the empire roughly a generation after the founder's death and after the Punjab proper had already gone. But it is an insider's list, it is itemised, and it is the only such itemisation this study has been able to find. Its author explains the accounting convention before giving the figures: every jurisdiction in every province has an *ijara* — a farmed rate — remitted annually to the royal treasury or applied directly to the soldiers' pay; the currency is the rupee; and the reckoning is done in *lakhs* of a hundred thousand.

The list runs, in round figures:

Kashmir with Muzaffarabad and dependencies, twenty-four lakhs. Dera Ghazi Khan, sixteen. Dera Ismail Khan, fourteen. Sind, ten. Shikarpur, nine. Multan, Peshawar, and the Khairpur group, six each. Kabul, five. Jalalabad four; the Liya and Lahore-Pindi group four. Herat three. Baluchistan, the Yusufzai districts, the Charkh-i Logar group, the Charikar and Lohani group, two each. Bamiyan and the Hazarajat, Attock and its neighbours, and Kukari, one each.

And Kandahar: **two lakhs.**

Two hundred thousand rupees, from the capital of the empire — the city Ahmad Shah built and named after himself, the province containing the entire Durrani settlement, the heartland whose defence and enrichment was the whole purpose of the state. Kashmir alone yielded twelve times as much. Dera Ghazi Khan, a frontier district on the Indus, yielded eight times as much. The total is given at somewhat over a hundred and twenty lakhs, and Kandahar's share of it is about one part in sixty.

Sort the same list by geography and the shape is unmistakable. The lands from the Indus eastward and Kashmir — Kashmir, the two Deras, Sind, Shikarpur, Multan, Peshawar, Khairpur, the Liya group, the Yusufzai districts, Attock — come to

something like ninety-eight lakhs, or four-fifths of the whole. The Afghan core proper, meaning Kabul, Jalalabad, Kandahar, Herat, Baluchistan, the Hazarajat and the districts around them, comes to about nineteen lakhs, or a sixth. And this is the picture *after* Lahore had been lost. In Ahmad Shah's own reign, when the Chahar Mahal and the Punjab revenues were being demanded and sometimes paid, the imbalance was heavier still.

Two cautions before this is used. The figures are an early nineteenth-century compiler's, not an audit, and they are round to the point of being obviously conventional. And they describe assessed *ijara* — what the farm was let for — not what a peasant paid or what the treasury received, two quantities that in a farmed system differ from the contract in opposite directions. Held with those caveats, the list still does something no other source in this case does: it puts the empire's fiscal geography on one page, and the page says that the Durrani state was funded by the Indus basin and Kashmir and not, in any meaningful sense, by Afghanistan.

What Kandahar cost

Set that two lakhs against what the province consumed and the arrangement stops being a curiosity and becomes the study's central equation.

Rawlinson's reading of the register gives the Durrani soldier's pay. A chief drew between a hundred and a thousand *tumans* a year by rank; an ordinary Durrani horseman drew twenty-five. Rawlinson reckoned a *tuman* at about eleven Company rupees, which puts the common horseman at something near two hundred and seventy-five rupees a year in cash alone, on top of a plough-land held free of revenue. Multiply by the standing quota of roughly six thousand horsemen and the cash salary bill for the rank and file of the Durrani cavalry comes to something on the order of sixteen lakhs — before a single chief is paid, before the household troops, before the artillery, before the court.

The province where those six thousand men lived, held their land and drew their exemptions produced two lakhs.

That is not a shortfall to be managed. It is a structural impossibility, and it means the arrangement had no domestic version. The Durrani heartland could not have paid for the Durrani settlement at any tax rate its own soil could bear, and the men who ran the state knew it, because they were the ones drawing the salaries. Everything else in this study — nine invasions, the Kashmir governorship, the demand for the Chahar Mahal, the tribute from Sind and Multan, the pressure on Khorasan — follows from that single line of arithmetic.

What the state took, and how

Three different extraction mechanisms ran at once, and the framework's usual fork between a flow and a stock does not quite cover them.

A flow, farmed. In Kashmir, Sind, Multan, the Deras and the Indus districts, the state let the revenue as an *ijara*. Collection rights went to a contractor — very often a Durrani *sardar* — who remitted a fixed sum to Kandahar and kept whatever more he could raise. Elphinstone found the identical practice still running in 1809: *"The Haukim generally farms the revenue of his province from government, and lets out that of the districts under him,"* with the accounts passing through several offices before reaching the king, and a great deal of peculation practised along the way.

The consequences of that mechanism are not incidental, and they are the whole explanation of the Kashmir record. A farmer's income is the difference between what he can extract and what he owes, his tenure is short and uncertain, and he has no interest whatever in the province's condition in ten years. He will therefore press to whatever the traffic bears and slightly beyond, and no signal from below will reach the sovereign, because the sovereign has already been paid. Elphinstone adds the detail that completes the picture: fines were levied on governors *"on their appointment to profitable districts,"* and in the unsettled times of his own day an unavowed profit was made from the sale of offices outright. A man who has bought his province recoups the purchase from the people in it.

A stock, in the core. In Kandahar the extraction did not take a share of the crop; it took the land. Nadir had converted the province to *khalisa* and assigned six thousand plough-lands as *tiyul*, and — a detail that deserves emphasis — he had also protected the old cultivators, assigning a portion of the crown land in every village to the former proprietors precisely so that it would stay under government assessment and out of Abdali reach. The Parsiwan peasantry, Rawlinson reports, had feared being sold into slavery to the Abdali, and Nadir's arrangement was a deliberate guard against it.

Ahmad Shah let that guard lapse. Over his reign the *tiyul*-holders came down off the hills, took the farming into their own hands, taxed the remaining peasantry at will, induced them to abandon or cheaply sell their plots, and settled their own clansmen on the dry lands and the newly irrigated *nawabad*. Over half the peasants' land and about three-quarters of the crown land passed into Durrani management, at a third to a half of produce. The state's revenue from Kandahar did not rise as a result; it stayed at two lakhs, because the transfer was not to the treasury. It was from one set of subjects to another, with the crown's licence, and the crown's return on it was not money but loyalty.

And the raid, which is neither. The Indian campaigns took stocks — coin, jewels, plate, temple treasure, animals, captives — from populations that were then left in place to be visited again. The reported yields are enormous and irreconcilable: the leading men of Lahore raised three million rupees in 1748 to buy off the sack; the 1757 Delhi campaign is estimated in the modern literature at anywhere between a hundred and twenty and three hundred million rupees in cash and treasure, a range so wide it is really a confession that nobody knows.

This third mode is worth naming because the framework's existing fork does not accommodate it. Extraction as a *rate* on a flow tends to an equilibrium, because the extractor needs the producer alive and producing and will ease back when he has gone too far. Extraction as *dispossession* of a stock has no equilibrium and tends to elimination, because the taking is all-or-nothing and cannot be tuned. The raid is a third thing: it takes a stock, but from a population it neither removes nor intends to govern. It has no equilibrium either — but for a different reason, which is that there is no ongoing relationship for an equilibrium to form in. The raider will be gone within the month and has no interest in next year's harvest, so nothing in his position restrains him, and nothing in the victim's position gives him a reason to comply next time beyond the presence of the horses.

The medium

The framework's medium-of-payment test asks what will be accepted in satisfaction of a tax, on the principle that the answer often reveals the tax's real purpose. Here the answer reveals something else, and it is one of the most telling small facts in the case.

The Durrani empire kept its accounts in **rupees**, and reckoned in **lakhs**. Abd al-Karim states it flatly when introducing the revenue table, and then converts for his Ottoman readers: each rupee is two *ghurush*, each lakh a hundred thousand rupees, and he gives the equivalent in Istanbul's units so that a reader in Turkey can follow.

The rupee is an Indian coin. An Afghan empire, ruled from Kandahar by a Pashtun dynasty writing its chronicles in Persian and grounding its dynastic claim in Turco-Mongol customary law, kept its fiscal books in the currency of the province it invaded nine times. Ahmad Shah struck his own coin, of course — the couplet claiming a command from the Peerless Almighty appears on rupees and *mohurs* from Kandahar, Kabul, Peshawar, Multan, Mashhad and Lahore — but the *unit* was Indian, because the money was Indian, because the revenue was Indian.

Where a state's accounting unit comes from a foreign province, follow the money in that direction and you will find the state.

There is a corollary in the core. What the exempted Durrani owed on his hereditary dry lands was not coin at all but wheat, barley or chaff, handed over when the army marched past. Rendering in kind, at irregular intervals, to soldiers rather than to collectors, is not taxation in any sense a treasury would recognise. It is provisioning, and it confirms from the other end what the revenue list says: the core was not a fiscal base. It was an establishment charge.

The attempt to build something better

It would be wrong, and the seed for this study warned against it, to leave the impression that Ahmad Shah was simply Nadir with a shorter memory. He tried, persistently and with some success, to convert raid into revenue.

The evidence is consistent across the reign. The court chronicle states that the first two Indian campaigns were mounted to assert his authority over the agriculturally rich Punjab, and specifically to obtain the revenues of the Chahar Mahal — Sialkot, Gujrat, Aurangabad and Pasrur — which the Mughal emperor had assigned to Nadir Shah in 1739 and which Ahmad Shah claimed by succession. Those four districts were worth, on the two standard modern estimates, between fourteen and twenty lakhs a year, which is to say between seven and ten times the revenue of Kandahar province. Non-payment of them was the stated cause of the third invasion of 1751–52. In 1757 he ratified the Nadirid *dastur* — the arrangement — securing Lahore, Multan, Kashmir and Sirhind, and installed his son Timur at Lahore as governor of the Punjab. These are not the acts of a man collecting loot. They are the acts of a man trying to get a province onto an annual assessment and keep it there.

At home the same intention is visible in stone and water. In January 1756 he began building a new capital north of Nadirabad, near the Payab river, because the old site flooded; the project included a substantial feeder canal from the Payab, itself drawn off the Arghandab, which brought previously unarable ground into cultivation — to the satisfaction, the chronicle says, of the local cultivators. He commissioned a land survey of Kandahar under an official named Mihrab Khan, the register that Rawlinson would still be working from eighty years later. And he staffed a functioning fiscal bureaucracy — *mustawfis*, *munshis*, accountants and comptrollers, many of them Iranians with experience in Nadir's own administration — running under a royal *diwan*.

None of that is a booty economy. It is a man who understood perfectly well that plunder is not sustainable, and who spent his reign trying to build the alternative.

He mostly failed east of the Indus, and the reason is the subject of the module before this one. He could not hold the Punjab on an annual assessment because he could not supply the protection an annual assessment implies, and a competitor could

and did, at a fifth of the revenue twice a year. He succeeded in Kashmir, which is why Kashmir is at the head of the revenue list — and the Kashmiri record of *begar*, cesses and peasant flight is what that success looked like from underneath.

Reading extraction against the framework

The seed's challenge, answered: the corpus's contrast with Nadir does not collapse, but it has to be restated, and one part of it was wrong.

The seed proposed that if the Durrani empire ran on India in the Afsharid manner, then the difference between the two men would be a difference in what they did with the plunder rather than in how they got it, and that the study should say so loudly. The arithmetic largely bears that out and the restatement is owed.

Both orders ran on India. This is now beyond argument for the Durrani case. Four-fifths of the assessed revenue came from the Indus lands and Kashmir; the capital province produced a fiftieth of the total and could not have paid a tenth of its own garrison's wages. The corpus should not again describe the Durrani state as an Afghan polity that happened to raid India. It was a state whose Afghan core was a beneficiary and whose fiscal body lay in the Indus basin.

But the difference is not only in the disposal. Two things separate the cases and both are documented. The first is direction: Nadir's Indian treasure went to a fortress at Kalat and stayed there, behind his best troops, while his collectors squeezed Iran to the point of depopulation; Ahmad Shah's went outward, into subsidies, salaries, titles, robes of honour and land, to the men whose loyalty he required. The second is the treatment of the core, and it is the sharper of the two: **Nadir taxed his heartland to destruction and Ahmad Shah exempted his entirely.** One built an army by consuming the country it came from; the other built one by exempting the country it came from and billing a different country. Both are answers to the same problem — a payroll larger than the domestic revenue — and they are opposite answers.

And a third difference the seed did not anticipate: Ahmad Shah tried to institutionalise. The land survey, the canal, the *diwan* staffed with Nadirid-trained Iranians, the demand for the Chahar Mahal by right of succession rather than by right of arms, the ratified *dastur* of 1757 — these are attempts to convert a raiding relation into an assessed one. He got about a fifth of the way. That is a real distinction from a pure booty economy and it should be recorded, along with the fact that it was not enough.

The refinement this module contributes: name the raid as a third extraction mode, distinct from the rate and from the dispossession. The existing fork sets extraction-as-rate, which needs the producer alive and tends to an equilibrium at the

edge of the revolt threshold, against extraction-as-dispossession, which needs the producer gone and tends to elimination. The Indian campaigns fit neither. They take a stock, like dispossession, from a population left in place, like a rate — and they have no equilibrium, because an equilibrium requires an ongoing relationship and a raider has none. **The raid's distinctive signature is that it produces no stable rate and no clearance, but a repeating cycle whose interval is set by the raider's own fiscal need rather than by anything happening in the victim's country.** Nine invasions in twenty-two years is not nine decisions; it is a payment schedule.

Two predictions follow and both are testable. First, **expect a raiding order to try to convert to assessment and to be able to do so only where it can supply protection** — Kashmir yes, the Punjab no — so that the map of what a raider successfully annexes is the map of where a rival protector could not operate. Second, **expect the raid to be the mode a state adopts when the gap between its establishment charge and its domestic revenue is too large to close by any rate**, which makes the raid diagnosable from the balance sheet before it is visible in the campaign record. Two lakhs from Kandahar against sixteen lakhs in cavalry salaries is a state that must raid, whatever its ruler intends.

And an accumulation. This module completes the equation the cost-column module set up. The exemption of the Durrani core and the ruin of Kashmir are not two policies of one government; they are one transaction seen at both ends. The revenue table is the proof, because it shows the money physically arriving from one place and being spent in another. **Where a settlement exempts the population that supplies the floor, the exemption has an address, and the address is on the revenue list.**

A note on sources. The province-by-province revenue figures are from Abd al-Karim "Bukhari," whose Persian account of Central Asia and Afghanistan was written in the early nineteenth century and published in Charles Schefer's edition and French translation as *Histoire de l'Asie Centrale* (Paris, 1876). The table is used here as reproduced and translated by Sajjad Nejatie in *The Pearl of Pearls* (PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 2017), where it appears as Table 2, together with Abd al-Karim's own note on the *ijara*, the rupee, the *lakh* and the conversion to Istanbul reckoning. The figures postdate Ahmad Shah's reign, describe an empire that had already lost Lahore, are round to the point of convention, and record assessed farms rather than receipts; they are used here for their proportions and not their absolute values, and no conclusion in this module depends on any single line of the list.

Henry Rawlinson's "Report on the Dooranee Tribes" (c. 1841), drawing on the military register of Ahmad Shah's government and on a land survey conducted by the

Durrani official Mihrab Khan, both now lost, supplies the *tiyul* arithmetic — six thousand plough-lands at roughly one per horseman, subdivided from three thousand double *kulbas* under Nadir — the salary scale of a hundred to a thousand *tumans* for chiefs and twenty-five for a horseman at about eleven Company rupees to the *tuman*, Nadir's protective assignment of crown land to the old proprietors in every village, and the transfer of peasant and crown land into Durrani hands at a third to a half of produce. It is a colonial administrator's summary of vanished documents with informants sympathetic to the dispossessed, and its proportions should not be read as measurements. It is used here through Nejatie.

Mountstuart Elphinstone's *An Account of the Kingdom of Caubul* (1815; 1839 edition) is public domain and is quoted verbatim on the farming of provincial revenue, on the fines levied from governors on appointment to profitable districts, and on the sale of offices. His overall revenue estimate for the kingdom of his own day — something near three crores nominal, under two crores real, about half of it assigned in *tiyul*, and upwards of nine million rupees reaching the king before the troubles of his time — is consistent in shape with the earlier list but describes a later and smaller state.

The account of the Chahar Mahal, the ratified *dastur* of 1757, the construction of Ahmadshahi from 3 January 1756 with its feeder canal from the Payab, and the composition of the Durrani fiscal bureaucracy follows Nejatie, drawing on the *Tarikh-i Ahmad Shahi*. The Chahar Mahal revenues are given at fourteen lakhs by Ganda Singh and twenty by Jadunath Sarkar. The three million rupees raised by the notables of Lahore in 1748 is from the standard narrative of that campaign. The estimates for the 1757 Delhi campaign, running from a hundred and twenty to three hundred million rupees, are modern reconstructions from contemporary accounts and should be treated as an admission of ignorance rather than a range.

MODULE 7

A Scribe to Match Astarabadi

Information and suppression — a king who sent abroad for a historian as good as his predecessor's, a tribal name deleted from the archive, an interpreter class that could not be bought, a chronicle that recorded the elephants without embarrassment; and the four incompatible memories the reign left behind

Hiring a historian

Around 1754, seven years into the reign, Ahmad Shah sent an instruction to Muhammad Taqi Khan Shirazi, a former Afsharid official then in his service. He wanted a scribe. Not any scribe: one with the skill to match Mirza Mahdi Astarabadi, who had written the *Tarikh-i Nadiri* for Nadir Shah and set the standard by which a Persianate conqueror's reign got recorded.

The man produced was Mahmud al-Husayni al-Munshi ibn Ibrahim al-Jami, and before he was admitted to Durrani service he was vetted by the court's clerics, among them Mulla Idris Khan, the Naqshbandi *pir* who held the offices of military judge and Shaykh al-Islam and would end his career as grand wazir. Mahmud al-Husayni was then instructed to set out the events of the reign plainly and without ornament, and he produced the *Tarikh-i Ahmad Shahi*, which runs to the whole of Ahmad Shah's twenty-five years and remains the single most informative source on it.

Take that sequence apart, because it is a complete apparatus described in three sentences. A ruler identifies the historiographical standard set by his predecessor. He procures a professional capable of matching it, through an official inherited from that predecessor's own administration. He has the candidate screened by his religious establishment before appointment. And he specifies the register — plain, unadorned — which is itself a rhetorical choice, since plainness reads as truthfulness and is therefore the most persuasive ornament available.

This is what the management of the record looks like when it is done well, and it is worth noting how little coercion is involved. Nobody was silenced. A capable man was hired, cleared, briefed, and paid, and the result is a work whose reliability is high enough that this study has leaned on it throughout — which is precisely the point. A chronicle that lies is worth little; a chronicle that is accurate about nearly everything and shaped only at the load-bearing joints is worth a great deal, and Mahmud al-Husayni's is that. Its shaping is visible at exactly the places one would predict: the

accession, where the assembly implores a reluctant Ahmad to take a throne that is his by inheritance; the lineage section, which grounds Sadozai leadership in customary law shared with the Ottomans and the Mughals; and the account of the Durrani as the source of Nadir's own power and therefore the rightful inheritors of it.

The name taken out of the books

The single clearest act of information control in the reign is one already noted for other purposes and worth returning to here, because its target was the archive.

Ahmad Shah prohibited the use of the name "Abdali." What that meant in practice, in the sources produced at his court, was retrospective deletion. The *Tarikh-i Ahmad Shahi* does not merely stop using the word; it calls Ahmad Shah's Abdali ancestors and predecessors "Durrani," in passages describing events that occurred decades before the name existed. Practically all official documents of the reign avoid the older name altogether. A poem preserved in the history attributed to the grand wazir records the decree, and an anecdote from a genealogical history records a fine imposed on anyone who spoke the word, deliberately or not.

Deleting a term from the record is a modest act with an immodest ambition: it aims at the past. The intended effect is that a reader a generation later, working from the court's own papers, finds no Abdali anywhere and concludes that the confederacy had always been Durrani — which is to say, had always been an appurtenance of Ahmad Shah's regnal title. It partly worked. The name Durrani is universal today. It also partly failed, since authors outside court circles went on writing "Abdali" during his lifetime and his successors did not maintain the prohibition, and since the deletion is so systematic that it announces itself to anyone comparing the court sources with the others.

What was not suppressed

Now the more instructive half, which is the absence.

There is no censorship apparatus in this case. No index of banned books, no licensing of copyists, no heresy trials, no political police, no register of subjects, no internal passports, no organ of surveillance of any kind that this study has been able to identify. The framework holds that surveillance is the tell of a belief that never took, and its converse: where a belief has taken, the machinery of watching is thin because it is not needed. In the Durrani core the machinery is not thin. It is missing.

And something more striking. The court chronicle *records the violence*. Mahmud al-Husayni sets down that Nur Muhammad Khan Alizai and Miyan Dad Ishaqzai were

trampled to death by elephants for conspiring against the shah. He sets down the imprisonment of Muhabbat Khan, Manu Khan and Gadu Khan. He records the revolt of the nephew Luqman Khan and the executions that followed it, the punishment of Shafqat Khan, the suppression of Mir Khwush Khan, and at the end of the reign the treachery of the grand wazir himself. A commissioned court history, written to glorify, sets out an execution by elephant and a running twenty-five-year record of the founder's own tribe trying to unseat him, and evidently saw nothing in any of it requiring concealment.

That absence is a finding and it has a structural explanation. Concealment is a service, and it is purchased for a particular kind of audience: one whose belief is load-bearing, who is distant enough not to see for themselves, and who would withdraw the belief if they did see. A ruler who answers to a home public — taxpayers, voters, a parliament, a metropolitan conscience — must keep what his floor does away from the people whose money and sons it runs on, and the whole apparatus of the laundered despatch follows. Ahmad Shah had no such audience. The people whose belief he needed were the Durrani, who were present at the executions, approved of most of them, and would have thought a king who could not have a traitor trampled a weak one. There was nobody to hide it from.

The absence of a cover-up is therefore not evidence of candour. It is evidence about the audience. Where the people whose conviction underwrites an order are also the people standing in the room when the floor is used, the order will describe its own violence plainly, and the historian gets a better record for it.

The class he could not buy

The framework's central question in this module is who holds the chokepoint between a population and the knowledge it cannot check, and whether that position is crowded or captured. Here it was crowded, and the evidence is unusually direct.

Ahmad Shah bought the interpreter class as comprehensively as any ruler in this collection. He was himself an initiate of the Mujaddidi Naqshbandi order, taking discipleship along with a large body of his commanders. He appointed *pirs* to the highest offices in the state — Mulla Idris Khan as military judge, Shaykh al-Islam and finally grand wazir; his brother as tutor to the crown prince. He patronised shrines, endowed a madrasa, corresponded with Sufi masters in Shikarpur and Lahore, and held a periodic assembly of the learned. He was, in Elphinstone's phrase, always ambitious of the character of a saint.

And when he asked that establishment to let him house the Prophet's mantle in the chamber of his own mausoleum, it said no. The inner chamber of the tomb had been

built for the relic; the *ulama* of Kandahar decreed that it should stay in the mosque where it had first been laid, and not be moved at a political leader's pleasure. It never was moved. A king who could have a khan trampled by elephants could not overrule a body of clerics on the location of a piece of cloth, and did not try.

The reason is the structure of the position rather than any weakness in the king. Religious authority in that country was eight centuries deep, distributed across thousands of mosques and shrines and *pir*-lineages, and answerable to a body of law and a chain of transmission the state had no part in and could not enter. Ahmad Shah could buy individual occupants of the position — and he bought a great many — but he could not buy the position, because it was not for sale and had no single owner. What he got instead was the ordinary bargain of a crowded seam: real influence, real sanction, and a firm limit.

Intelligence, and the informer at Jandiala

Against rivals outside the faith the picture is different, and here the state does show an apparatus, of the simplest and most effective kind.

Ahmad Shah's campaigns against the Sikhs turned repeatedly on information, and the sixth invasion turned on a named informer. Aqil Das of Jandiala, the head of a Sikh sectarian establishment hostile to the Khalsa, sent messengers who reached the shah at Rohtas in early 1762 with news of where the Sikh column was and what it was encumbered with. The forced marches that followed produced the interception at Kup Rahira on 5 and 6 February.

This is the classic shape of the thing and it deserves naming plainly: the most valuable intelligence about a formation comes from inside it, from a faction that has its own quarrel with the dominant tendency, and it comes free. Aqil Das was not bribed into it; he was already an enemy of the Khalsa. A conqueror facing a formation he cannot enter will always look for the seam within it, and there is almost always one, because no formation is unanimous.

The mirror of it is Qazi Nur Muhammad's *Jangnama* of 1765, which is an information artefact of a different and rarer type: commissioned praise-literature that leaks. Written to glorify an expedition and financed by a participant in it, it nonetheless contains a full and evidently reluctant description of the enemy's discipline, conduct code and religion — because the audience it was written for needed to understand what it was up against. Propaganda produced for people who have to act on it is constrained by their need for accurate information, and that constraint is where the historian gets in.

Destroying a rival centre

The suppression that mattered most was not of speech but of a building, and it has already been examined for what it did to formation. It belongs here too, because it was an information operation and was conceived as one.

Amritsar was the place where the Sikh body assembled, deliberated by *gurmata* and resolved as a whole. Destroy the shrine and the tank and you destroy the venue in which a scattered confederacy becomes a single actor — which is a coherent theory of how to break a rival order, and is roughly what a modern government does when it bans a party's congress. It was attempted in 1757, executed in 1762 when the temple was blown up and the tank filled, and repeated in 1764.

It failed for the reason set out in the formation module, and the failure has an informational dimension worth adding. A rival interpretive centre can be physically destroyed. What cannot be destroyed by the same means is the *interpretive authority*, which lives in a dispersed body of people who carry the transmission in themselves and who will reassemble somewhere else. Ahmad Shah destroyed the venue three times and the assembly kept meeting. The framework's rule that the trusted-information position is structural — never created, never abolished, only occupied or crowded or captured — holds here in its most literal form: he vacated a position and it refilled, and it refilled with people who now had an additional grievance to transmit.

Four memories

Which brings the module to the problem the reign actually bequeathed: not censorship, but four incompatible national memories, each of which needs Ahmad Shah to have been a different man.

In Afghanistan he is Ahmad Shah Baba, father of the nation, founder of the state, unifier of the tribes, poet and saint. The national anthem in force from 2006 to 2021, with lyrics by Abdul Bari Jahani, names him. His face and his wheat-sheaf crown have been state emblems. The 254th anniversary of his death was publicly commemorated.

In Sikh memory he is the author of the *Vadda Ghallughara* of February 1762 and the man who blew up the Harimandir Sahib and filled the sacred tank — commemorated annually, and integral to a martyrology that runs from Baba Deep Singh through Baba Gurbakhsh Singh and forms one of the constitutive stories of the community.

In Indian and Maratha memory he is Panipat: the sack of Delhi in 1757, the plundering of Mathura and Vrindavan, the destruction of a generation of Maratha leadership on a single day in January 1761, and the captives taken away afterward.

And within Afghanistan itself there is a fourth, quieter reading, now increasingly audible: that the order he founded distributed land, office and exemption to one confederacy at the expense of Tajik, Hazara and Uzbek populations, and that the political centralisation of Pashtun tribal patronage which he inaugurated is the origin of a durable ethnic imbalance rather than of a nation.

Every one of these is grounded in things that actually happened. He did found a durable state and he did write mystical poetry; he did destroy the Harimandir and he did kill tens of thousands of Sikh non-combatants at Kup; he did break the Marathas and take captives; and his settlement did distribute the country to one confederacy. The four memories are not four interpretations of contested facts. They are four selections from an agreed set, made by four constituencies that needed different things.

The discipline this project holds requires saying that plainly and then declining to arbitrate. Naming a memory's function is not the same as showing it to be false, and none of these is false. What can be done is to ask which constituency needed which shape and when — which is a question about the twentieth century rather than the eighteenth.

The chronicle that lost

And here is the finding this module did not expect.

The narrative architecture that underlies the modern Afghan national story is **not** the founding chronicler's. Mahmud al-Husayni's *Tarikh-i Ahmad Shahi* — the commissioned, vetted, contemporary court history, the most informative source in existence on the reign — was substantially neglected by later Afghan historians. What propagated instead was Sultan Muhammad Khan Barakzai's *Tarikh-i Sultani*, written in the later nineteenth century, and Fayz Muhammad Katib's *Siraj al-tawarikh*, written under the Barakzai amir Habibullah at the beginning of the twentieth. Those two works, in Nejatie's assessment, have since their publication been widely propagated and formed the narrative basis of the story of Ahmad Shah's coronation and thus of the founding of Afghanistan itself.

Consider what that means. The Barakzai were the clan that displaced Ahmad Shah's line — descendants of the wazir Shah Wali Khan's kinsmen, who took the throne from the Sadozai in the internecine wars after 1818 and ruled until 1973. Their chronicle's account of 1747 is, unsurprisingly, one in which Ahmad Shah's kingship depended on the consent of the Durrani amirs, in which Hajji Jamal Khan Barakzai is a kingmaker, and in which the khans agreed to a Sadozai only because his was a minor clan and he could be removed if needed. It contains a demonstrable anachronism: it places among the electors a man Nadir had executed in 1738. It is a nineteenth-century usurping

dynasty explaining, retrospectively, why the dynasty it displaced never held its throne by right.

And that is the version that became the nation's founding story. It passed into Ghubar's 1943 biography, from there into the grade-twelve textbook of 1949, and from there into general circulation — acquiring on the way the nine days of deliberation and the silent candidate that appear in no eighteenth-century source at all.

This is worth stating as a general lesson because it inverts an assumption easy to carry into any case: **the founding chronicler's architecture is not necessarily the one still doing the work.** Chronicles do not propagate on merit. They propagate because somebody later has an interest in propagating them and the means to do it, and the somebody is usually whoever holds the presses, the schools and the ministry of culture — who is, by then, frequently the successor of the people who overthrew the founder. When tracing a founding narrative, do not stop at the earliest source; ask which source actually reproduced, and look for the interest that carried it.

The circle that wrote the nation

That interest can, in this case, be named, and the naming is the sharpest thing in the module.

In 1931 the Afghan king Muhammad Nadir Shah instituted the *Anjuman-i Adabi*, a literary society housed in the northern tower of the royal palace and supervised by the king's own secretariat, with the stated aim of improving and promoting the literature of the country. It had thirteen charter members. It published the monthly journal *Kabul* from June 1931. Its successors were the *Anjuman-i Tarikh*, the historical society, and the *Pashto Tolana*, the Pashto society.

Follow the names out of that room.

Mir Ghulam Muhammad Ghubar was a charter member. He wrote *Ahmad Shah Baba-ye Afghan* in 1943 — the biography containing the nine-day deliberation and the silent candidate — and it was awarded a state prize and translated into Russian. He later wrote *Afghanistan dar Masir-i Tarikh*, probably the most widely circulated book ever published in Afghanistan.

Abd al-Ghafur Breshna was a charter member, a member of the royal lineage, and the painter who illustrated Ghubar's book with the image of Sabir Shah placing the wheat-sheaf on Ahmad Khan's turban at Sher-i Surkh — the picture through which most Afghans have seen the founding scene. He also composed the music of the Afghan national anthem adopted in 1973.

Abd al-Rauf Benawa was a prominent member of the Pashto Tolana. In 1957 he wrote that from ancient times onward the Afghans had possessed special assemblies

called *jirga*, whose decisions every Afghan considered himself bound by as a national duty. He wrote the lyrics of that same 1973 national anthem.

M. Osman Sedqi was a member of the historical society. He wrote the grade-twelve history textbook, first published in 1949 and still in use into the mid-1950s, in which the Great Assembly at Sher-i Surkh, the eight meetings of self-promoting chiefs, the silent Ahmad Khan and the Sufi's wheat-crown appear as the founding of the national government.

One small state-supervised circle, over about three decades, produced the biography, the illustration, the schoolbook, the scholarly assertion of the *jirga*'s antiquity, and the national anthem. That is the interpreter class of a modern nation-state caught in a single room with its members' names on the door — and it is doing exactly what the framework says such a class does, which is to feed an authorised reading through the formative institutions while a rival reading goes simply untaught.

Two things must be said immediately, or this becomes a cheap point. First, every nation does this, and the men in that room were not frauds. They were anti-colonial nationalists building a state's self-understanding in the decades after independence, working with the sources available to them, and Ghubar in particular was a serious historian who spent time in prison for his politics. Second, the sources they worked from were themselves already shaped — the European reconstructions of the Persian chronicles, and behind those the Barakzai-era histories. The circle inherited a distorted picture at least as much as it manufactured one. What can be said with confidence is narrower and sufficient: the founding scene of modern Afghanistan reached its familiar form in the 1940s, in a state literary society, and the eighteenth-century sources do not contain it.

Reading information against the framework

The seam here was crowded, and the case shows what a crowded seam costs a ruler and what it buys everyone else. Ahmad Shah captured no interpretive monopoly. He bought individual clerics comprehensively and hit a wall the moment he asked the class as a body for something it judged improper. The cost to him was a chamber that stayed empty. The gain, for the order, was a real constraint on the crown that no institution of the state supplied — and it is the only such constraint this study has yet found. That belongs on the ledger when the plurality module runs.

The refinement this module contributes: the absence of concealment is a fact about the audience, not about the ruler. The framework already holds that the colonial robe is cut for the metropole and that keeping the two ends of the story apart becomes the order's standing information task. This case supplies the control. Here

there was no distant paying public, and accordingly there was no laundering: a commissioned court history sets down executions by elephant and a quarter-century of tribal conspiracy without apparent embarrassment. **Concealment is purchased only where a belief that is load-bearing belongs to people who cannot see for themselves.** Where the people whose conviction underwrites the order are present at the floor's operation and approve of it, the order tells the truth about itself — and the historian's archive is better for it, which is a caution worth carrying: candour in a source may indicate not honesty but the absence of anyone who needed to be lied to.

And the second refinement, on the reception problem: check which chronicle propagated, not which came first. The founding chronicler here was commissioned, vetted and excellent, and he lost. The version that became the nation's origin story came from the chronicle of the dynasty that overthrew the founder's line, was reshaped again in a state literary society in the 1940s, and reached the population through a schoolbook, a painting and eventually an anthem. **A founding narrative's architecture belongs to whoever held the presses two centuries later, and that is characteristically not the founder's heirs.** The tell is a detail too well-shaped to be incidental surviving into modern accounts with no chain of citation behind it — a number like nine, a silence, a unanimity — and the method is to trace it to its earliest printed appearance and then ask who paid for the printing.

A note on sources. The commissioning of Mahmud al-Husayni — the instruction to Muhammad Taqi Khan Shirazi to procure a scribe capable of matching Mirza Mahdi Astarabadi's *Tarikh-i Nadiri*, the hiring around 1754, the vetting by court clerics including Mulla Idris Khan, and the instruction to write plainly — follows Christine Noelle-Karimi's work on Durrani historiography and Sajjad Nejatie, *The Pearl of Pearls* (PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 2017), which also supplies the evidence for the prohibition of the name "Abdali" and its retrospective application in the court sources, the record of the executions and revolts in the *Tarikh-i Ahmad Shahi*, and the assessment that later Afghan historiography neglected that chronicle in favour of the Barakzai-era *Tarikh-i Sultani* and *Siraj al-tawarikh*.

The account of the Kabul literary societies and their membership — the *Anjuman-i Adabi* founded in 1931 under the royal secretariat with thirteen charter members and the journal *Kabul* from June 1931, its successors the *Anjuman-i Tarikh* and *Pashto Tolana*, Ghubar's 1943 *Ahmad Shah Baba-ye Afghan* and its state prize, Breshna's illustration of the coronation scene, Benawa's 1957 assertion of the *jirga*'s antiquity, and Sedqi's 1949 textbook — is from M. Jamil Hanifi, "Editing the Past: Colonial Production of Hegemony through the 'Loya Jerga' in Afghanistan," *Iranian Studies* 37, no. 2 (2004), 295–322. Hanifi is a forceful and polemical writer and his framing should

be read as such; the biographical and bibliographical particulars he gives are checkable and have been checked where possible. That Breshna composed and Benawa wrote the national anthem adopted in 1973 is independently attested and is this study's own observation, not Hanifi's.

Qazi Nur Muhammad's *Jangnama* (completed c. June 1765) is described as in the preceding module. Aqil Das of Jandiala's intelligence to Ahmad Shah before the Kup campaign is from the standard Sikh historiography and is not independently attested outside it. The 2006–2021 Afghan national anthem, with lyrics by Abdul Bari Jahani, names Ahmad Shah Baba; the 1973 anthem's lyrics were by Abdul Rauf Benawa and its music by Abdul Ghafoor Breshna.

Contested matters are flagged. The verse in which Ahmad Shah prefers the summits of the Afghan mountains to the throne of Delhi circulates very widely in Afghan sources and is the single most quoted line attributed to him; it does not appear in Henry Raverty's 1862 selection from the *divan*, the earliest published English selection, and this study has not been able to verify it against any eighteenth-century text. It is noted and not used. The four memories described in this module each rest on their own body of partisan historiography — Afghan nationalist, Sikh, Indian and, more recently, non-Pashtun Afghan — and no attempt is made here to adjudicate between them beyond establishing which underlying events are agreed.

MODULE 8

Whoever Is Fit

Elite coordination and the default — the audit link by link; a grand wazir who claimed the throne in verse and was reinstated four years later; a court chronicle forced to repudiate the doctrine that seated its own patron; and the outlet that closed seven years before the founder died

What the default is, and what has to be shown

The claim this module tests is not that the Durrani elite liked one another. Several of them tried to kill one another and some succeeded. The claim is narrower and harder: that in a durable order the arrangement is built so that each man in it, pursuing nothing more elevated than his own advantage, thereby holds up the whole — so that the order is defended by default, without anybody coordinating anything, because defending one's own position and defending the arrangement are the same act.

Where that condition holds, an order survives bad rulers, factional hatred and long absences. Where it fails — where a group with standing and the means to act stops drawing a benefit — the order fractures, and it fractures from that group, not from below.

So the work is an audit. Go down the hierarchy, link by link, and ask of each man: *if this arrangement collapsed tomorrow, would he be better or worse off?* Then find the link where the answer changes.

The audit

The apex household. Ahmad Shah's inner circle was drawn overwhelmingly from his own clan and, in several cases, from the ten men he had personally chosen as a junior officer in Mazandaran twenty years before the throne. Shah Wali Khan of the Salihzai-Bamizai branch of the Popalzai was grand wazir, *ashraf al-wuzara*. Jahan Khan Popalzai was *sardar* and Khan of Khans. Abdullah Khan was *diwan begi*, head of the fiscal council, and accumulated estates in Kandahar, Kabul, Jalalabad, Kashmir and India. Ja'far Khan Popalzai commanded the slave corps. Mulla Idris Khan, a Mujaddidi *pir*, held the military judgeship and the office of Shaykh al-Islam and ended as grand wazir. Elphinstone found the convention still fixed a generation later: the grand wazir ought always to be of the Bamizai division of the Popalzai, and most great offices under Ahmad Shah went to Popalzai.

Would these men be worse off without the arrangement? Enormously. They held the highest offices in Asia's newest empire and estates in four provinces. **Answer: they defend it.**

The clan sardars. Nine clans, each with allotted land held free of revenue, each furnishing a contingent commanded by its own hereditary chief, each with a share in the Indian plunder and access to provincial governorships. Worse off without it, obviously.

But here the audit produces its first complication, and it is the one the settlement module found and the formation module confirmed by a second route. The sardar held his land heritably, of the crown rather than of the man; his contingent answered to him and was organised by descent; his office was removable in law and customary in his family; and a supply of alternative Sadozai princes was guaranteed by a clan immunity that made them unkillable by the state. He would defend the *dispensation* to the death and had no particular stake in the *occupant*. **Answer: he defends the arrangement, and will change the king inside it whenever it suits him.**

The provincial governors. Durrani *sardars*, non-resident, farming the revenue of a province from the crown and letting out the districts beneath them, keeping the surplus. Elphinstone records that fines were levied on them on appointment to profitable districts. A man who has bought a farm wants the farm to continue. **Answer: defends it, and is indifferent to everything about the province except the yield.**

The ghulams. The household corps — Qizilbash, Tajiks, Uzbeks, men from Nadir's old army, and some Durrani — recruited precisely because they had no tribe in the country and no land except the king's grant. For these men the arrangement is not a source of advantage; it is the only thing standing between them and nothing. **Answer: they defend the occupant himself, which is the whole reason they exist.**

The tributaries. Nasir Khan of Kalat, who revolted in 1758, was reduced, and thereafter rode with the Durrani army into the Punjab in 1764. Shahrukh at Mashhad, a blinded Afsharid kept as a client. Ala Singh of Patiala, confirmed in Sirhind, given the title King of Kings and the right to strike coin. The Kalhoras in Sindh. Najib-ud-Daula in the Doab. Each of these kept his own country and paid for the privilege, and each would have to fight somebody worse if the Durrani went. **Answer: they defend it while it is winning and not one day longer** — which is the standing property of a tributary and the reason tribute is the weakest link in any chain.

The princes. And here the audit changes sign. Ahmad Shah had seven sons by the court chronicle's count and perhaps ten by others. He distributed appanages: Timur to Herat, Sulaiman to Kandahar, Parwiz to Kabul, Sikandar to Peshawar. Each prince got

a province, a household, a revenue and a body of troops — and a claim. **Answer: each is better off under the arrangement and better off still if he, rather than his brother, is at the top of it.** The appanage system, borrowed from Turco-Mongol practice, hands every son the resources to contest the succession and the standing to justify it.

That is the fault line, and it is at the top.

What actually held it: the outlet

Before following the fracture, the module has to account for the twenty-five years in which none of this broke — because it did not break, and the framework should be able to say why.

The answer is the Indian campaigns, and their function was not primarily fiscal.

They were fiscal, of course; the revenue arithmetic makes that plain, since the capital province yielded two lakhs against a cavalry salary bill many times larger. But a campaign does four things at once for an order shaped like this one, and only the first is money.

It **pays** the subsidies, the salaries and the exemptions that buy the Durrani.

It **absorbs** the surplus. An order with polygynous elite reproduction, no primogeniture, an appanage system and a growing landholding class produces more men with claims than it has positions, every generation. A campaign gives them somewhere to be.

It **occupies** the coordinating class. A *sardar* riding into the Punjab in November is a *sardar* who is not at Kandahar intriguing over the succession, and his contingent is under the king's eye and on the king's business.

And it **renews the warrant**. A coin claiming a command direct from God, with no caliph and no emperor in the chain, can only be evidenced by victory. Each campaign was the proof.

That is the framework's Export family doing four jobs at once, and the whole blend of solutions in this case rested on it. **The outlet was the enabling condition of everything else.**

Its closure is dateable. The Sikhs took Sirhind in January 1764 and Lahore in April 1765. The eighth invasion, in 1766–67, achieved nothing durable. The ninth, in 1769, was the last, and by then Ahmad Shah was four years into the illness that would kill him. From roughly 1765 the Punjab was not producing revenue, not absorbing claimants, and not supplying victories.

The outlet closed seven years before the founder died, and the order lasted one generation past it.

The doctrine that could not be held twice

Now the sharpest single piece of evidence in this study, and it sits in the founder's own commissioned chronicle.

Sometime before 1764 the grand wazir, Shah Wali Khan, began making a claim, and the *Tarikh-i Ahmad Shahi* preserves it in verse, apparently as recited before Durrani soldiers. Its structure is worth following because it is a complete constitutional argument.

He begins with indispensability: were it not for his involvement, the affairs of the world would lose their order; through his efforts things achieve arrangement; if he turned a single page of the book, endless unrest and rebellion would follow. Then he moves to descent: his own ancestor Salih was a full brother — *baradar-i sulbi* — of Ahmad Shah's ancestor Sado, so that if vicegerency came to Sado's line it may also come to Salih's. And then the principle, stated flatly: *kunad saltanat har ki layiq buwad* — "sovereignty is exercised by whoever is fit." He closes by observing that his lineage too runs back to Salih, qualifying him to sit upon the throne, and that he does not lack the necessary trappings.

That is the open problem speaking in the first person. The centre requires capable men to exist at all; the capacity that makes a man useful is exactly what would let him replace the centre; and here is the most capable man in the state saying so out loud, in metre, to soldiers.

Mahmud al-Husayni then answers on his patron's behalf, and the answer is where the trap closes. Kingship, he writes, is in the hands of God, to bestow on whom He wills. And then: *bi-miras shahi nakarda ast kas* — "no one has ever taken kingship by inheritance." Kingship comes by providence and nothing else. Not every gem is fit for a crown; not every limb of the body can stand in place of the head.

Set that beside the same chronicler's account of the accession twenty-five years earlier, in which the assembled khans implore Ahmad to sit upon *awrang-i saltanat-i mawrusi*, **the hereditary throne of sovereignty**, which is his by *miras* — inheritance — because his ancestors had always held the leadership of the confederacy.

The same book, the same author, the same patron. At the founding, kingship is an inheritance. When a collateral claims by inheritance, nobody has ever taken kingship by inheritance.

This is not hypocrisy caught out; it is the structural problem made textual. **A hereditary claim is available to every collateral of the line, so the doctrine that seats a founder is the doctrine that unseats his heirs, and any order resting on descent must at some point repudiate descent in order to survive.** The chronicler's escape — a direct divine bestowal, unmediated, unpredictable, not transmissible — is

the same claim the coinage makes, and it has the same defect: it can be asserted by anyone who wins, which is to say it settles nothing and merely postpones the argument to the next contest of arms.

The wazir, twice

What Ahmad Shah did about Shah Wali Khan is as instructive as the claim itself.

In 1764–65 his son Timur, one of the wazir's fiercest rivals at court, informed him of the disloyalty. Ahmad Shah dismissed Shah Wali Khan from the wazirate, demoted him to *sipah-salar* — a military command he held in name only — excluded him from affairs of state, and barred him from the Records Office. The grand wazirate went to Mulla Idris Khan, the *pir* who was already Shaykh al-Islam and military judge; a cleric, that is, with no clan contingent behind him.

Mulla Idris died in 1766. And in 1769, Shah Wali Khan — having served obediently in the interval and repented — was **reinstated as grand wazir.**

Read that sequence as an experiment the ruler ran and lost. A man claims your throne. You strip him of office, exclude him from the archive, and replace him with a cleric who cannot threaten you. Within three years the cleric is dead and you have nobody else who can do the job, and you put the claimant back.

That is the open problem in its most exact form: the competence that made the wazir dangerous was the competence the state could not do without, so the punishment was necessarily temporary. And the reinstatement was not weakness or sentiment. It was arithmetic. The alternatives were a cleric who died, or a rival Popalzai who would have the same claim within a decade, or running the state himself while dying of a facial cancer.

Three years after the reinstatement Shah Wali Khan tried again, with a better instrument.

1772

Ahmad Shah died in the Toba hills in the summer of 1772 — the court chronicle gives 2 Rabi' I 1186, which is 4 June, while most English accounts give October; the tomb inscription confirms only the year. He had named Timur his heir. Timur was at Herat.

Shah Wali Khan had, in the meantime, married his daughter to the prince Sulaiman, who held Kandahar. In the disorder after the death, the wazir and a group of Durrani khans put Sulaiman on the throne in the capital.

Timur marched from Herat, took Kandahar, captured Sulaiman — who was imprisoned in the Bala Hisar at Kabul and spent his life there — and executed Shah Wali Khan. He then convened a military tribunal and executed a number of other dissident Durrani amirs. A relative, Abd al-Khaliq Sadozai, revolted with Durrani backing at Kandahar and was put down. Later there was a plot to replace Timur with his brother Sikandar.

The seed for this study asked whether the crown's victory in 1772 strengthened the order or began its end. The evidence says the second, and the mechanism is traceable step by step.

What Timur had to do

Timur had won by force against a coalition of the men whose grandfathers' grandsons would have to fight his wars. Every subsequent decision he took was rational insurance, and every one of them cut a strand of the default.

He **moved the capital** from Kandahar to Kabul, away from the Durrani heartland and toward the Qizilbash community that had been settled there since Nadir's time — men with no tribe in the country, removed from intra-tribal disputes, and loyal to the crown because they had nothing else.

He **reduced the number of Durrani soldiers** in the army and leaned on the *ghulam-i shah*, the royal slave corps, increasingly composed of non-Durrani.

And he **ended his father's tax concessions**, insisting that Durrani proprietors of the peasant and newly irrigated lands be assessed at the same rate as the Parsiwans.

The Durrani refused, and the ground on which they refused is the most revealing sentence in the whole sequence: the privileges Ahmad Shah had granted them were hereditary, they said, *since they represented the real source of his power and authority*.

That is the default speaking, and speaking correctly. They were right on both counts. The privileges had by then been treated as hereditary for a generation, in a fiction of recognition their own grandfathers had watched being written. And they were the real source of the crown's power, because the crown's army was the sum of their contingents.

But notice what has happened to the ledger. Under Ahmad Shah the Durrani sardar's self-interest and the arrangement's survival pointed the same way: hold the arrangement, draw the exemption, ride to India, take the share. Under Timur they came apart. The arrangement was now taxing him, disarming him, and preferring foreigners over him. Ask the default question of a Durrani chief in 1785 and the answer has flipped: **he would be better off with a different king, and the means to get one were in his own hands.**

The group with standing and means had stopped benefiting. That is the fracture condition, and everything after 1793 is its working out.

Twenty-four sons

Timur died on 20 May 1793, leaving — on the standard count — twenty-four sons.

Set that against the machinery. No rule of primogeniture. An appanage system that gave princes provinces, revenues and troops. A clan immunity that made a Sadozai unkillable by the state, so that a defeated claimant could be blinded or imprisoned but not removed. Nine clan contingents whose chiefs could each swing behind a candidate. And no outlet: the Punjab gone since 1765, Kashmir dwindling, no campaign to send the surplus on.

The framework holds that elite overproduction is the standing pressure the open problem generates, and that where an outlet exists the pressure discharges outward and where it does not it discharges inward. Here the overproduction was not of a credentialed class or of landless younger sons; it was of *princes*, generated directly by the royal household's own reproduction, and it arrived at the exact moment the outlet closed.

What followed is a thirty-year civil war, and its shape confirms the audit. Zaman Shah took the throne in 1793 with the decisive backing of Payandah Khan, chief of the Muhammadzai branch of the Barakzai — a kingmaker, exactly as the settlement predicted, and from the clan that had always had the most men and the poorest land. In 1800 Zaman executed him. Payandah Khan's sons united; Fateh Khan engineered Zaman's blinding and installed Mahmud in 1801; Shuja took the throne in 1803; Mahmud returned in 1809 with Fateh Khan and Dost Muhammad behind him; and in 1818 Mahmud had Fateh Khan tortured and killed, at which his brothers removed the dynasty. By 1818 the Durrani state held little more than Kabul and its surroundings. By 1823 the last Durrani ruler had been deposed by the Barakzai.

And the seed of it is dateable to 1765–66, when Ahmad Shah married his son Timur to a granddaughter of Hajji Jamal Khan Barakzai. That marriage — a textbook co-optation by kinship, recorded in the court chronicle — raised the Barakzai at court and, on Nejatie's assessment, in many ways paved the way for their usurpation. **The instrument that bound the largest clan to the dynasty is the instrument by which the largest clan eventually took it.**

Classifying against the Menu

The framework requires an explicit classification with the evidence stated. This case is a blend of four families, and the interaction is the finding.

Co-opt, by grant and by kinship — the primary draw. Land held free of revenue in exchange for one horseman per plough; the highest offices concentrated in the ruler's own clan; marriage alliances upward to the Mughal house in 1757 and downward to the Barakzai in 1765–66. The consideration was **armed service**, which is the older and more dangerous form, and the case supplies the predicted failure mode on schedule.

Prevent, by outsider recruitment — a secondary draw, and larger than it looks. The *ghulam khana*, formed at the outset of the reign under a Popalzai commander and built from Iranians of Nadir's old army, Tajiks and others with no tribal base in the country. Elphinstone gives its establishment at upwards of thirteen thousand — larger than the twelve thousand horse the Durrani clans owed. Ahmad Shah ran a Prevent solution *inside* a Co-opt settlement from the first year.

Divide-and-balance — deliberate and documented. Elphinstone: the Achakzai were a branch of the Barakzai, separated by Ahmad Shah *"to reduce the formidable numbers of that clan,"* placed under a separate chief and thereafter entirely unconnected with the clan they sprang from. A king cutting his own largest clan in two is not managing a tribal confederacy; he is administering it.

Export — the enabling condition. Nine campaigns in twenty-two years, functioning simultaneously as revenue, as an absorber of surplus claimants, as an occupation for the coordinating class, and as the continuous evidence for a warrant that could only be evidenced by victory.

And a partial **Assume-the-chair**, which deserves noting because it explains a weakness. Ahmad Shah did sit down in an existing seat — Nadir's. He took the *tiyul* register, the fiscal bureaucracy and its Iranian personnel, the military system, the Turco-Persian offices, and the claim to the Mughal cessions west of the Indus. What he could not take was the warrant, because Nadir's authority had been personal, rested on victories, and had died with him at Fathabad. He inherited an apparatus without a title to it, which is why so much of the reign is spent manufacturing one — the dervish's grass, the coin's direct divine command, the renaming, the Cloak.

The finding in the blend is that Export was load-bearing for all of it. Remove the campaigns and the Co-opt cannot be paid, the surplus cannot be absorbed, the sardars have nothing to do but intrigue, the ghulams cannot be funded, and the warrant stops being evidenced. Four solutions were resting on a fifth, and the fifth was a province in somebody else's country.

Reading elite coordination against the framework

The default held for twenty-five years and it was rented. Every link in the chain except the princes answered the default question in the arrangement's favour, and the order accordingly reproduced itself without any cabal, through men who tried repeatedly to kill each other. But the audit shows *what* they were defending, and it was not the king. It was a dispensation that paid them, funded from outside, in which the occupant was a replaceable component. The clearest formulation available is Elphinstone's, and it is a description of a default that works perfectly while remaining lethal to every individual sovereign: the crown would pass between members of the royal house *"without a struggle"* by a general combination of the tribe.

The refinement this module contributes: where a blend of Menu solutions rests on an Export outlet, the whole blend has the outlet's lifespan, and the collapse will be misdated if the outlet's closure is not treated as the event. The Durrani order is conventionally dated from Ahmad Shah's death in 1772 or from the fratricide after 1793. Both are too late. The load-bearing member failed between 1764 and 1769, when the Punjab ceased to be collectable, absorbable or winnable, and everything afterward is a structure standing on a broken beam. **Look for the outlet before looking for the crack, and date the order's fate to the outlet's closure rather than to the founder's funeral.** The interval between the two — seven years here — is the order's residual life on accumulated capital, and it is characteristically about a generation.

A second refinement, on the doctrine: a hereditary warrant is a warrant every collateral holds. This case caught the problem in a single text, which is rare. The founder's chronicle grounds him in *miras* at the accession and, when the grand wazir claims by descent from the founder's ancestor's brother, is obliged to write that nobody has ever taken kingship by inheritance. **A descent claim cannot be made exclusive, because the descent is shared; so an order founded on lineage must eventually assert something non-transmissible — divine election, personal fitness, conquest — and each of those can be asserted by whoever wins the next fight.** The tell to look for, in any dynasty resting on blood, is the moment its official historian starts arguing against inheritance. It means a collateral has done the arithmetic.

A third, on co-optation: the punishment of an indispensable man is necessarily temporary. Ahmad Shah demoted a wazir who had claimed his throne, barred him from the records, replaced him with a cleric — and reinstated him within four years, because the substitute died and no safe alternative existed. **Where the co-opted man's usefulness and his dangerousness are the same property, the apex cannot discipline him permanently, and every apparent resolution is a postponement.**

The wazir's second attempt, in 1772, succeeded to the extent of putting his own son-in-law on the throne for a season, and cost him his head — and cost the dynasty rather more than that.

And an accumulation, not a new claim. Three independent mechanisms in this study now converge on the same fault line. The settlement gave the sardar heritable land, his own contingent and a protected supply of alternative princes. Formation taught every Durrani boy that his commander was his hereditary khan and the Sadozai were the royal house, in the same recitation. And the audit shows the default holding for the dispensation and failing for the occupant. Three routes, one result: **an order that was extremely stable and whose rulers were extremely disposable.** When the outlet closed and Timur was forced to insure himself against his own base, the first of those properties went and the second remained.

A note on sources. The two poems are from Mahmud al-Husayni's *Tarikh-i Ahmad Shahi*, the commissioned court chronicle composed from about 1754, cited from Dostmurad Saidmuradov's Moscow edition and quoted here through Sajjad Nejatie's translation in *The Pearl of Pearls* (PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 2017), where both are given with the Persian. Shah Wali Khan's claim that his ancestor Salih was a full brother of Sado and that sovereignty belongs to whoever is fit — *kunad saltanat har ki layiq buwad* — and the chronicler's answer that no one has ever taken kingship by inheritance — *bi-miras shahi nakarda ast kas* — are quoted in short and otherwise paraphrased. The accession passage grounding the claim in *miras* and the *awrang-i saltanat-i mawrusi* is from the same chronicle. Nejatie also supplies the sequence of the wazir's dismissal in 1764–65 on Timur's information, his exclusion from the Records Office, the appointment and death of Mulla Idris Khan, the reinstatement in 1769, the appanage distribution among the princes, the 1765–66 Barakzai marriage alliance and its consequences, and the assessment that Timur's centralising reforms provoked the Durrani claim that their privileges were hereditary.

Mountstuart Elphinstone's *An Account of the Kingdom of Caubul* (1815; 1839 edition) is public domain and is quoted verbatim on the Achakzai being separated from the Barakzai to reduce that clan's formidable numbers, on the wazirate belonging by convention to the Bamizai Popalzai, on the establishment of the *ghulam khana* at upwards of thirteen thousand, on the twelve thousand horse owed by the Durrani clans, on the fines levied from governors on appointment to profitable districts, and on the crown passing between members of the royal house without a struggle by a general combination of the tribe.

The post-1793 sequence — Zaman Shah's accession with Payandah Khan's backing, Payandah's execution in 1800, the union of his sons, the blinding of Zaman, the reigns

of Mahmud and Shuja, the killing of Fateh Khan in 1818 and the Barakzai takeover — follows the standard narrative histories, principally Jonathan L. Lee's *Afghanistan: A History from 1260 to the Present* (2018). Timur Shah's twenty-four sons is the conventional figure and is given as such.

Contested points are flagged. The date of Ahmad Shah's death is disputed between 2 Rabi' I 1186 (4 June 1772) in the court chronicle and 16 or 23 October 1772 in most English accounts; the tomb inscription gives only the Hijri year, which spans both. The number of Ahmad Shah's sons is given as seven in the *Tarikh-i Ahmad Shahi* and at least ten by Abd al-Karim "Bukhari." Whether Sulaiman or Timur was the elder is disputed in the older literature, deriving from Ferrier and followed by Ganda Singh, and is rejected by Nejatie. The year Timur moved the capital to Kabul is given variously between 1773 and 1776.

MODULE 9

The Wishes and Opinions of the Governed

Plurality or foreclosure — a real bundle of enforceable immunities held by one confederacy, a Shi'a minority granted religious autonomy because the crown needed a counterweight, a body of clerics that told a king no and made it stick; and no institution anywhere through which any of it could be contested except by war

The question

Was there liberty here, or only the appearance of it?

The question is not whether the state was gentle. Gentleness is a fact about a ruler's temperament or his budget and it evaporates with either. The question is whether anything stood between a person and the state apparatus that the apparatus could not simply remove: a protection he could invoke, a place the state's arm did not reach, a court that would rule against the crown, an assembly that could meet, a petition that had to be answered, a career in opposition that a man could survive.

And the second question, which is the one that makes the first tractable: where would such a thing have come from? Not from below. Peasants do not draft immunities. Protections are extracted by factions *inside* the hierarchy, bargaining from strength at moments when neither they nor the apex wants to break the arrangement — and once extracted they sit there, accreting, so that a concession wrung by one group in one quarrel becomes, two generations later, a thing that looks like a right. So the method is to look for the factional fight, and then to ask who else ended up standing in the shelter it built.

Elphinstone, describing the Durrani country as it stood a generation after Ahmad Shah, wrote a sentence that this module has to take seriously and then take apart:

> *"there are few communities where the wishes and opinions of the governed are more attended to."*

He was not a sentimentalist and he was not writing propaganda; he was a British envoy compiling an intelligence report on a state his government might have to fight. The sentence is evidence. The work is establishing which governed he meant.

What a Durrani actually had

Set out the bundle, because it is substantial and this study would be dishonest to minimise it.

Exemption from land revenue. Elphinstone names it first and adds a judgement: the Durrani were exempt from all payment of revenue, *"itself the great source of oppression in Asiatic nations."* Not a reduced rate. Exemption.

Immunity from military requisition. *"No troops are allowed to maraud in their lands, or indeed in any part of Afghaun Khorassaun."* That is a stated rule about what an army may not do to a civilian population, and it was observed — in the Durrani country. Set it beside the same army's conduct in the Punjab and its boundary is exact.

A minimal state. The only shape in which the Durrani felt the government, Elphinstone writes, was in its demand for their fixed contingent of troops and in its interposition to keep the public peace, by which they were themselves the principal gainers.

Elected headmen. Beneath the *sardar* appointed by the king from the head family, and the *khans* appointed by the *sardar* from theirs, the *maliks* and *mushirs* of the smallest divisions were *"in most cases, elected from the proper families by the people, subject to the Sirdar's approval."* A restricted franchise choosing among eligible lineages, subject to a veto — but an election, at the level where a man's actual life was governed.

An assembly whose decrees the state enforced. Disputes that the elders could not settle went before the *jirga*, and its decrees were, if necessary, *supported by the Sirdar* — the state's coercive arm executing the findings of a body the state neither convened nor controlled.

Courts under a law the crown did not make. The *qazi* judged by the *sharia*, modified by acknowledged parts of *pashtunwali*, with *muftis* giving opinions in doubtful cases and a *darogha-i adalat* supervising for conformity to law. Elphinstone: the *qazi*'s orders *"are never disobeyed, it being reckoned impious to refuse to conform to the Shirra,"* and where resisted, the *sardar* was obliged to enforce them.

A limit on the state's monopoly of punishment. In homicide the *sardar* first attempted composition by *khoon behau*, the price of blood. If the injured family refused, the case went to the king, who ordered the *qazi* to try it — and if the man was convicted, the crown *gave him up to be executed by the relations of the deceased*. The state adjudicated; the family killed. A sovereign who cannot conduct his own executions is a sovereign under a real constraint.

Sanctuary. Raverty records that Ahmad Shah's tomb at Kandahar was *"respected as a sanctuary, no one venturing to touch one who has taken refuge there."* A physical place where the state's arm stopped.

And, at the very top, an immunity from capital punishment. No retaliation or punishment could be inflicted on a Sadozai except by a member of their own family; not even the head of the confederacy could pass a sentence of death on one.

That is not rhetoric. Every item is specific, was observed, and had a mechanism behind it. It is a bundle of enforceable protections of a kind that many far larger and more admired states of the period did not offer their subjects.

Whose

Now the boundary, and it is total.

Every protection listed above attaches to membership of one confederacy. The exemption from revenue is the exemption of *tiyul*- and *mawrusi*-holders. The immunity of lands from marauding troops is the immunity of Durrani lands. The elected *maliks* are elected within the *khels*. The *jirga* whose decrees the *sardar* enforces is the *jirga* of a Durrani clan. The Sadozai immunity covers one lineage of one clan.

Ask what any of it did for the Parsiwan cultivator of the Arghandab, whose land was passing into his neighbours' hands at a third to a half of produce and who ended the reign labouring for a Durrani proprietor with just enough to subsist on. Nothing. He had no *jirga* the *sardar* would enforce, no exemption, no clan, and his landlord *was* the local magistrate — since, as Elphinstone notes of the military tenure, the officers of the horse raised on a district were the civil magistrates of the district that maintained them.

Ask what it did for the Kashmiri peasant under *begar*, coming before the governor with a plough held over his head and a petition tied to the top of it. Nothing.

Ask what it did for the captives sold out of Delhi and Mathura. Nothing.

So Elphinstone's sentence is true and its subject is a caste. **The governed whose wishes and opinions were attended to were the governed who owed horses.** The bundle of liberties and the bundle of obligations are the same bundle, held by the same people, and the boundary of the one is the boundary of the other.

That is the ordinary shape of liberty in a pre-modern order and it should be stated without either surprise or sneering. Freedom held by a warrior caste, funded by a subject peasantry and a raided periphery, is what most of the celebrated liberties of history looked like at the point of origin. The question this project keeps asking is what makes such a thing spread beyond its original holders, and this case is instructive precisely because it shows the mechanism starting and then not completing.

Where they came from

Not one of these protections came from below, and each can be traced to a moment when a faction with standing and means had leverage.

The revenue exemption exists because a pastoral, armed, mobile population could not be taxed by a crown that needed its horses more than its harvest. It was extracted at the moment of maximum leverage — Nadir's need for Abdali cavalry after 1738, Ahmad Shah's need for it after 1747 — and it was written down as a condition of tenure. When Timur Shah tried to remove it, the holders refused, on the ground that the privileges were hereditary *since they represented the real source of his power and authority*. They were bargaining from strength and they said so.

The immunity of Durrani lands from marauding is the same bargain in kind rather than cash: an army recruited from a population cannot be allowed to plunder that population, and the rule follows automatically from the recruitment.

The Sadozai immunity from execution predates the monarchy and constrains it. Elphinstone observes that it was greater than any king's patent could have obtained from such a tribe — which is to say it was not granted by a sovereign at all, but was a prior condition the sovereign inherited and had to live inside. It protected Ahmad Shah, and it protected every rival prince who ever contested one of his descendants.

The refusal of royally appointed chiefs is a liberty enforced by nothing but non-cooperation, and it worked. Chiefs appointed outside the head family *"were obeyed with reluctance, and the clan waited impatiently for a rebellion, headed by a Suddozye, to throw off their new chief, and the King who appointed him."* A collective decision to obey slowly is one of the oldest instruments the ruled possess, and here it defeated a sovereign's writ repeatedly.

And **the competition itself** was a mechanism, which Elphinstone identifies explicitly and which is the module's central evidence for the accretion the framework predicts. The king's power rested on the sardars and the sardars' on the king; each viewed the other with jealousy; and *"it is of great consequence both to the King and the nobles to obtain popularity."* Two elite parties bidding for the same constituency's goodwill will make concessions to that constituency which neither would make alone. The liberties of the Durrani householder are, in significant part, the residue of a permanent quarrel between the crown and the chiefs over who commanded him.

That is the mechanism this project is looking for wherever it looks for liberty. It operated here. It produced real protections. And it stopped at the edge of the confederacy, because the quarrel it grew out of was a quarrel about that constituency and nobody was bidding for the Parsiwan's goodwill.

The clerics' decree

One counterweight in this order was not tribal, and it is the only one that ever told the crown no on a matter the crown cared about.

Ahmad Shah brought the mantle of the Prophet to Kandahar in 1768 and built an inner chamber in his own mausoleum to house it. The *ulama* of Kandahar decreed that the relic should stay in the mosque where it had first been laid and should not be moved at a political leader's pleasure. The chamber stayed empty. The king who had a khan trampled by elephants did not overrule them and did not try.

The framework's question is whether the trusted-information position was crowded or captured, and here it was crowded to the point of being untakeable. Ahmad Shah bought its occupants as thoroughly as any ruler in this collection — took Naqshbandi initiation with hundreds of his officers, appointed a *pir* as Shaykh al-Islam and finally grand wazir, endowed shrines, corresponded with masters in Lahore and Shikarpur — and it made no difference to the answer, because the authority was eight centuries deep, distributed across thousands of mosques and *pir*-lineages, and answerable to a law and a chain of transmission the state had no part in.

What the episode produced was not a victory for either side but a **division that both could enforce**: the clerics keep custody and doctrine, the crown keeps the veto on public display. That division has now outlasted the Sadozai, the Barakzai, the monarchy, the republic and two occupations, and it was still operating in 1996 when a claimant to national leadership had to obtain the custodians' permission before he could hold the relic over a crowd.

A negotiated division of a sacred object is a strange-looking constitutional settlement. But it is one, and it has held for two hundred and fifty years, which is longer than most written ones.

The men who were let in

The user's rule for reading this module is to look for anyone below the nobility who got *in*, and then to find the factional fight that let them. This case has a clear instance, and it is a large one.

The Qizilbash were Turkic-descended, Persian-speaking, **Shi'a**, and foreign. Garrisons of them had been stationed at Kabul and Kandahar by Nadir Shah. Qizilbash officers had murdered Nadir at Fathabad in June 1747 and then tried to massacre the Afghan contingent in the camp — which is to say they were, at the founding moment of the Durrani state, its enemies in the most literal sense.

Within a few years Ahmad Shah had integrated them into his forces and his administration, and the terms are remarkable. On Jonathan Lee's account he granted them **land, self-governance, and religious autonomy** — the right, in a Sunni Pashtun state, to remain Shi'a and to run their own affairs. They formed the core of the *ghulam khana*, the household corps recruited expressly to balance the Durrani and Ghilzai chiefs. And because most Durrani leaders could not read or write, the Qizilbash came to control the civil service almost entirely.

Now find the factional fight, because it is not hidden. The crown's problem was a coordinating class that held heritable land, commanded its own contingents by descent, and would change the occupant of the throne whenever it suited. The answer was a body of armed, literate men with no tribe in the country, no land except the king's grant, and no possibility of allying with the Durrani against him. Religious autonomy was not extended out of a principle of toleration; it was extended because the men were useful and their difference was precisely what made them safe. **A minority received a charter of liberties as a by-product of a quarrel inside the ruling class, and the charter's guarantee was the quarrel's permanence.**

Then watch the residue accrete, exactly as the framework predicts. Timur Shah, forced by the 1772 succession war to insure himself against his own base, moved the capital to Kabul partly to be near them, settled more of them there, and leaned on them further. By the early nineteenth century the Jawanshir Qizilbash were a semi-autonomous, armed, entrenched bloc in the Chindawol quarter of Kabul, with marriage alliances into the Barakzai elite, numbering perhaps eighteen to twenty thousand in the city by the 1830s — and they were kingmakers, having helped install Mahmud Shah in 1801.

And then watch the limit. A liberty that exists because a faction is useful lasts as long as the faction is useful and no longer. In 1803 Sunni clerics in Kabul used a military setback as a pretext to turn a mob on the Qizilbash quarter, and hundreds died on both sides. Later in the century, under a centralising amir, the state's structure was made Sunni in a way that obliged Qizilbash to practise concealment of their faith. The same period saw the Shikarpuri Hindu bankers — who had financed the state, and one of whom Ahmad Shah made minister at Lahore in 1748 — destroyed as a community in Kabul by trading monopolies and confiscation, until by 1886 a British report counted eight Indian subjects left in the city's Central Asian trade.

That arc — granted for utility, accreted into a communal position over fifty years, attacked when the utility changed, and finally suppressed by a stronger state — is the life cycle of a liberty that has an immunity behind it and nothing else.

What did not exist

Set against all of the above, the absences, which are the more decisive half.

There was **no printing** and therefore no press, no pamphlet, no public whatever in the sense that word acquires elsewhere in the eighteenth century.

There was **no representative institution above the tribe**. The *jirga* was real, ancient and effective, and it operated — as its own students describe it — on the margins of the state, in opposition or alternative to it. It adjudicated among tribesmen. It had no jurisdiction over the king, could not summon him, could not review his acts, and could not levy or refuse a tax. The *loya jirga*, the grand national assembly with a constitutional role, did not exist; the term itself is a coinage of 1922 and the institution a construction of the twentieth-century Afghan state.

There was **no charter and no written limit on the crown** — no document that a subject or a chief could hold up and cite against a royal order.

There was **no court with jurisdiction over the sovereign**. The *qazi* judged under a law the crown did not make, which is a genuine constraint on the crown's conduct toward subjects, but no case was ever brought against a Durrani king in a Durrani court.

There was **no survivable opposition career**. Nur Muhammad Khan Alizai and Miyan Dad Ishaqzai were trampled to death by elephants; Muhabbat, Manu and Gadu Khan disappeared into prison; Shah Wali Khan was executed and a tribunal killed a number of amirs with him; Payandah Khan was executed in 1800 and Fateh Khan tortured to death in 1818. The Field Manual's sharper test of a representative institution is whether an opposition career is survivable and where its members go afterwards. Here they went under an elephant.

And there was **no channel of any kind** through which a faction could contest a royal decision short of raising its contingent and fighting.

Immunity and channel

Which produces the distinction this module exists to make, and it is the study's answer to the question of what turns a liberty into more than words.

The Durrani order was unusually rich in **immunities** — statements of where the state may not go. Do not tax this man. Do not plunder this district. Do not execute this lineage. Do not seize this fugitive at that tomb. Do not overrule this assembly's finding. Do not move this relic. Every item in the bundle above is of this form, and the reason they were enforceable is precisely that they are negative, local and specific: they require

the state to refrain, in a named place, from a named act, and a state that transgresses one can be visibly caught doing so.

The order possessed no **channels** at all — no institution through which the holder of an immunity could contest a policy, review a decision, or say no to the crown collectively without a war.

The difference is decisive and the case demonstrates why. Immunities do not aggregate. A thousand men each holding a personal exemption are a thousand men, not a parliament, and when the crown moves against the exemption as a class — as Timur Shah did — their only options are individual evasion or collective armed revolt. That is exactly what happened: the Durrani did not petition, litigate or vote against Timur's assessment; they refused, and then their grandsons fought a thirty-year war. **An order with strong immunities and no channels is not on the road to constitutional government. It is on the road to civil war, because it has given a large armed class both a grievance and a right to feel wronged, and no way to press either short of rebellion.**

The corollary is where the liberty came from and why it stopped. Immunities are cheap for a ruler to grant, because each is a promise about one thing in one place and costs nothing until it is tested. Channels are expensive, because a channel is a standing capacity to be told no. A ruler under factional pressure will therefore concede immunities freely and channels never, and the residue that accretes from a century of factional bargaining will be a thick stack of protections and no institution — which describes the Durrani order exactly, and describes a great many others.

What makes a liberty more than words, on this evidence, is not the strength of the protection but the existence of somewhere to take a complaint.

Reading plurality against the framework

Classification: plural at the core, wholly foreclosed at the periphery, and with the three monopolies not fully fused. The framework holds that plurality is what a durable order looks like when violence, wealth and trusted information are not all captured by one coalition. Here they were not. Violence was distributed among nine clan contingents and a household corps, so that the crown's army was a coalition rather than a possession. Wealth was substantially in the hands of a landholding class with heritable title and its own retinues. And trusted information was held by an interpreter class the crown could buy piecemeal and never own, which told it no once, on a matter of the first importance, and made it stick. That is a genuinely non-fused arrangement, and the protections catalogued above are its product.

It was also, in the same breath, absolutely foreclosed for the great majority of the empire's subjects, who lived in provinces that were farmed to contractors and had no counterweight of any kind. **An order can be plural at its core and foreclosed at its periphery, and this one was both to an extreme degree — the plurality of the centre being financed by the foreclosure of the edge.**

The refinement this module contributes: distinguish an immunity from a channel, and expect factional bargaining to produce the first and never the second. The framework's plurality module asks what counterweights exist that the apex does not own, and judges each genuine or captured. This case shows a third possibility that neither term catches: counterweights that are entirely genuine, wholly uncaptured, effective in defeating royal acts — and incapable of aggregating into a capacity to govern the crown, because each is a local prohibition rather than a standing institution.

Stated for testing: **immunities are the natural residue of factional bargaining, because they are cheap to grant and self-enforcing where a group can withdraw cooperation; channels are not produced by that process at all, because a channel is precisely what an apex under pressure will refuse. An order can therefore accumulate immunities for centuries and end no closer to a constitution than it began — and the accumulated immunities will make its eventual crisis worse rather than better, by furnishing a large armed class with a sense of violated right.** The tell to look for is a rich vocabulary of exemptions and protections combined with a complete absence of any body that meets on a schedule.

And on where liberty comes from, the case confirms the framework's answer and adds a caution. No protection here originated below. Each was extracted by a faction with standing at a moment of leverage — the tribes when the crown needed cavalry, the clerics when the crown needed sanction, the Qizilbash when the crown needed a counterweight against the tribes. Elphinstone's competition between king and sardars, in which both must court popularity, is the accretion mechanism caught in operation, and it produced real gains for ordinary Durrani households.

The caution is that the mechanism has a boundary, and the boundary is the constituency the factions are competing *for*. Nobody was bidding for the Parsiwan's goodwill, and so the residue never reached him. **A liberty produced by elite competition extends exactly as far as the electorate that competition is fought over, and not one village further.** Which suggests, though this study cannot establish it, that what widens liberty is not the intensity of factional conflict but the *enlargement of the constituency whose support the factions need* — and that where an elite can fund itself from a raided periphery, it never needs to enlarge that constituency at all.

A note on sources. Mountstuart Elphinstone's *An Account of the Kingdom of Caubul* (1815; 1839 edition) is public domain and is quoted verbatim throughout this module: that few communities attend more to the wishes and opinions of the governed; that the Durrani were exempt from all payment of revenue, itself the great source of oppression in Asiatic nations; that no troops were allowed to maraud in their lands or in any part of Afghan Khorasan; that the only shape in which they felt the government was the demand for their contingent and its keeping of the peace; that *maliks* and *mushirs* were in most cases elected from the proper families by the people subject to the *sardar*'s approval; that disputes went before the *jirga* and its decrees were supported by the *sardar*; that the *qazi*'s orders were never disobeyed, it being reckoned impious to refuse the *sharia*, and that the *sardar* was to enforce them; that in homicide the crown gave the convicted man up to be executed by the relations of the deceased; that the Sadozai could not be punished except by their own family and that this privilege was greater than a king's patent could have obtained; that royally appointed chiefs were obeyed with reluctance and the clan waited for a rebellion headed by a Sadozai; and that it was of great consequence to both king and nobles to obtain popularity. He is describing the order of about 1809 on the evidence of informants, having never entered the Durrani country himself.

Henry Raverty's *Selections from the Poetry of the Afghans* (1862) is public domain and supplies the sanctuary at Ahmad Shah's tomb. M. Jamil Hanifi's Encyclopaedia Iranica article "Jerga" and his "Editing the Past," *Iranian Studies* 37, no. 2 (2004), supply the *jirga*'s operation on the margins of state structure and the modern invention of the *loya jirga*.

The Qizilbash material follows Jonathan L. Lee's *Afghanistan: A History from 1260 to the Present* (2018) for Ahmad Shah's grant of land, self-governance and religious autonomy, for their recruitment into the *ghulam khana* as a balance against Durrani and Ghilzai chiefs, and for their near-total control of the civil service on account of Durrani illiteracy; and the standard literature on the Kabul Qizilbash for the Chindawol bloc, the population figures of the 1830s, the marriage ties to the Barakzai, the kingmaking of 1801 and the anti-Shi'a violence of 1803. Sajjad Nejatie's *The Pearl of Pearls* (2017) supplies the composition of the *ghulam khana* under Ahmad Shah as more mixed than the later picture suggests, and Timur Shah's shift toward non-Durrani troops. Shah Mahmoud Hanifi's *Connecting Histories in Afghanistan* (2011) supplies the destruction of the Shikarpuri Hindu banking community in Kabul under Abd al-Rahman and the report of eight remaining Indian subjects by 1886.

Contested points are flagged. Elphinstone's assessment that the Durrani were governed with unusual attention to their wishes is his own judgement, made about a

group he admired and about a period after Ahmad Shah's death, and it should be read as the testimony of a sympathetic and well-informed outsider rather than as a measurement. The claim that non-Muslims under Ahmad Shah were subjected to sumptuary restrictions after 1757 circulates widely but this study has not been able to trace it to a contemporary source and does not rely on it. The number of Qizilbash in Kabul is given at eighteen to twenty thousand by the 1830s, well after the period of this study.

MODULE 10

Twenty-Four Sons

Change and collapse — the crack was at the top and had a number; the outlet closed seven years before the founder died; and the rival that took the revenue base was not a peasantry rising but a hierarchy the extraction itself had incubated

What did not happen

No peasant took this order down.

The Parsiwan cultivators of the Arghandab, dispossessed across a generation and reduced to labouring on land their fathers had owned, did not rise. The Kashmiris under *begar* did not rise; they emigrated, which is what people do when they cannot fight and can walk. The Punjabi villagers did not rise; they bought protection from somebody else, which is a market transaction and not a revolt. The Hazaras in the highlands were never inside the order enough to leave it. The captives sold out of Delhi and Mathura had no capacity to do anything at all.

This is the ordinary finding and it should be stated plainly before the interesting part, because it is very nearly a law. An unarmed and unorganised population does not defeat an intact, officered military, and the Durrani army remained intact and officered throughout Ahmad Shah's life and well past it. When a structural change comes, it comes from people who command organised violence, and in this order that meant nine clan contingents, a household corps of thirteen thousand, and a royal family.

So the question is which of them broke it, and when.

The dated sequence

Set the events out in order and the shape declares itself.

1753. The Sikh *misls* begin offering *rakhi* — protection at a published rate — in the Punjab, the province that supplies four-fifths of the empire's revenue.

January 1764. Sirhind falls to the *misls*.

April 1765. The Bhangi *sardars* take Lahore from the Durrani governor's nephew. The Punjab has, in any fiscal sense, gone.

1766–67. The eighth invasion. Jahan Khan, the commander-in-chief, is defeated at Amritsar; nothing durable is recovered.

1768. A riding accident at Kabul produces the ulcer of the nose that will kill Ahmad Shah. In the same year he acquires the Cloak, builds the mausoleum chamber, and begins distributing appanages to his sons.

1769. The ninth and last Indian campaign. Nothing recovered.

1772. Multan falls to Sikh forces. Ahmad Shah dies. Shah Wali Khan and a group of Durrani khans put the prince Sulaiman on the throne at Kandahar; Timur marches from Herat, takes the capital, imprisons his brother for life and executes the wazir, then convenes a tribunal and executes a number of dissident amirs.

1773–76. Timur moves the capital from Kandahar to Kabul, reduces the Durrani element in the army, leans on the Qizilbash household corps, and attempts to assess Durrani proprietors at the same rate as the Parsiwans. They refuse.

1783. The Kalhoras of Sindh fall to the Talpurs; Durrani suzerainty there becomes nominal.

20 May 1793. Timur dies, leaving twenty-four sons and no rule of succession.

1793–1801. Zaman Shah takes the throne with the decisive backing of Payandah Khan, chief of the Muhammadzai Barakzai. In 1800 he executes him.

1801–1818. Payandah Khan's sons unite. Fateh Khan engineers Zaman's blinding and installs Mahmud in 1801; Shuja takes the throne in 1803; Mahmud returns in 1809 with Fateh Khan and Dost Muhammad behind him. In 1818 Mahmud has Fateh Khan tortured to death, and Fateh Khan's brothers destroy him.

1818–1823. Multan falls to Ranjit Singh in June 1818, Kashmir in July 1819, the Peshawar valley by 1823. The Durrani state holds little more than Kabul and its surroundings. In 1823 the last Durrani ruler is deposed by the Barakzai.

Two things in that sequence deserve the module's attention. The first crack is the loss of the revenue base and it is complete by 1765, seven years before the founder's death. The second is the fracture in the royal family, and it is total by 1793. Everything after is aftermath.

The crack: fracture, with overproduction as the engine

The framework names four ways a floor cracks — the elite fractures, exhausts itself in great-power war, is conquered by a rival elite, or overbreeds. This order supplies three of them at once, and their relation is legible.

Overproduction is the engine. Twenty-four sons is not an accident of one man's fertility; it is the predictable output of a machine. Polygynous royal reproduction, no rule of primogeniture, an appanage system borrowed from Turco-Mongol practice which handed each prince a province with its own revenue and troops, and a clan immunity under which no Sadozai could be executed by the state — so that a defeated

claimant could be blinded or imprisoned but never removed from the board. Every one of those features had a reason when it was adopted. Together they constitute an apparatus for manufacturing armed claimants faster than thrones become available.

Fracture is what the engine produced. And note where it ran: not between the crown and a rising class, but *inside the royal family and between clans of the ruling confederacy*. Zaman against Mahmud against Shuja; Sadozai against Barakzai; Popalzai wazirs against princes. The Field Manual's instruction is to name the counter-elite that led, and to insist it is the disappointed insiders rather than the crowd. Here the counter-elite is the most insider group imaginable — the sons of a chief who had himself been the kingmaker, from the clan that had always had the most men and the poorest land, bound to the dynasty by a marriage Ahmad Shah had arranged in 1765–66 precisely in order to secure them.

And exhaustion arrives in a form the framework should note. The Durrani order did not exhaust itself in a great-power war in the European sense; it was never bled white by a peer. What it exhausted was its *external revenue base*, and the effect on the floor is the same. An order whose establishment charge exceeds its domestic revenue by an order of magnitude — two lakhs from Kandahar against a cavalry salary bill many times that — has no capacity to absorb the loss of the province that pays. When Lahore went, the subsidies could not be paid, the surplus could not be absorbed, the sardars had nothing to do but intrigue, and the warrant that had to be evidenced by victory stopped being evidenced.

The three run together. The outlet closes; the crown, unable to pay, must instead tax and disarm its own base; the base, whose formation and whose grant had both taught it that its privileges were hereditary and that it was the real source of the crown's power, refuses; and the royal family, breeding claimants with no outlet to send them to, turns on itself. **Take away the Punjab and every other mechanism in the order fails in sequence.**

The cost column emptying

The Field Manual asks for the moment when the credible expectation of organised violence against a defector ceased to be credible, and notes that a floor can empty without cracking — an enforcer may keep every soldier and lose only the credibility of using them.

That moment can be located here with unusual precision, and it is not a battle.

Ahmad Shah won almost every engagement he fought in the Punjab. He beat the Marathas at Panipat in January 1761 in one of the largest battles of the century. He caught and destroyed a Sikh column at Kup in February 1762 and blew up the

Harimandir. He was never beaten in the field by the *misls* in any way that decided anything.

And in April 1765 the Bhangi *sardars* took Lahore, and he did not get it back.

What had emptied was not the army's capacity but the *duration* of its reach. A cavalry army that arrives in November and leaves in March produces a credible threat for four months of the year and nothing for eight. As long as no competitor could operate in the other eight months, that was sufficient. From the moment a competitor could — from the moment a village could buy protection at a fifth of the revenue twice a year, from somebody who did not go home in the spring — the Durrani threat stopped being the operative fact in a Punjabi's life. The floor had not cracked. It had become **seasonal**, and a seasonal floor cannot hold a province against a permanent one.

That is the emptying, and its date is the date the *rakhi* market became general, which the Sikh sources put in the mid-1750s and which was decisive by 1764.

Was it a rising?

Here the module must be careful, because the Sikh case looks at first sight like the exception to the law and is not.

The Khalsa's social composition was genuinely popular. The initiation of 1699 admitted Jats, artisans and men of low caste on equal terms and gave them all one name; the *rakhi* system was built on villages; and the Qazi who rode with the invading army noted with evident surprise that the Sikhs had divided the Punjab among themselves and given a share to every man, young and old. Nothing in this study wishes to minimise that. It was a formation with a radically wide base, and its breadth is why it could not be destroyed.

But breadth is not what took Lahore. What took Lahore was a **hierarchy**, and the transition can be dated.

By 29 March 1748 the sixty-five *jathas* had combined into the Dal Khalsa under a supreme command. By the 1750s the *misls* had named chiefs — *sardars* — with their own contingents, their own banners, their own territories and a rule for dividing booty by the number of men each had contributed. From 1753 they had a revenue system taking a fixed share twice yearly after each harvest. They had an assembly at Amritsar that resolved by *gurmata* and bound the whole body. And they fought pitched engagements with cavalry, artillery and manoeuvre against the best army in the region.

That is not a peasantry. That is a military-fiscal organisation with a settlement of its own, and by 1765 it was a state in everything but name; by 1799 Ranjit Singh had taken Lahore and by 1801 he was Maharaja.

A formation cannot take a province. A formation that has become a hierarchy can. The distinction matters because it saves the framework's law without patronising the people it applies to. The Khalsa did not defeat the Durrani by rising; it defeated them by acquiring sardars, contingents, revenue and an assembly — that is, by becoming the kind of thing that can beat an army. The moment of danger for the Durrani was not the Baisakhi of 1699 but the Baisakhi of 1748.

What the order built against itself

And now the finding this module did not expect, which is where the four cracks need supplementing.

The framework's third crack is conquest by a rival elite — an outside apex defeating the local floor. That is what eventually happened to the Durrani in the Punjab, Multan, Kashmir and Peshawar. But the rival elite was not an outside power that happened to be there. **It was manufactured, in the Durrani revenue base, by the Durrani method of extraction.**

Follow the manufacture step by step, because every step is in the earlier modules.

The order **took a province without governing it**, farming its revenue to contractors and appearing once a year with or without a force according to the necessity of using intimidation.

It therefore **failed to supply protection**, which is the one thing a state sells a cultivator — and it failed doubly, because its own army was the principal recurring threat. That created an unfilled demand and a market for anyone who could meet it at a price.

It **installed no formation** in the province, because forming the Punjab would have meant admitting the Punjab to a settlement of fixed size that its existing holders were already fighting over. So the field was left to a formation the order neither built nor could enter.

And then it **fed that formation the one input it most valued**, by demolishing its shrine three times and killing tens of thousands of its non-combatants at Kup, converting every act of suppression into a martyrdom and a story to be recited to children.

Each of those was a rational decision given the constraints. Together they built a competitor. **An order that extracts from a province without governing it will, given time, incubate its own successor there** — because the unmet demand for protection is a business opportunity, the ungoverned field is a recruiting ground, and the violence used to suppress the result is the material the result is made of.

That is not a fifth crack so much as an account of where the third one comes from. The framework holds that conquest by a rival elite is one of the ways a floor breaks. This case adds: **the rival elite is sometimes the order's own by-product, and where it is, the collapse is not bad luck but a return on investment.**

The people's real role

Their role was real and it was not authorship, and both halves should be said.

Punjabi villagers *chose* — the sources say *opted* — to pay a fifth of their revenue to somebody else. That decision, repeated across hundreds of villages, funded the Dal Khalsa and starved the Durrani. It is the single most consequential thing ordinary people did in this whole history. And it is a cost imposed on a policy, not a seizure of an apparatus: the villagers did not take Lahore, the *misl* chiefs did, and the villagers' new landlords in due course taxed them too. The framework's line — that popular pressure reliably changes the price of a policy, which is real power, and that this is cost rather than authorship — is exactly right here and both halves have to be stated to describe what happened.

Kashmiri peasants emigrated in numbers sufficient to damage the valley's agriculture. That raised the cost of the Kashmir farm to whoever held it and lowered its yield. It changed nothing about who held it.

Durrani tribesmen supplied the contingents — to Zaman, to Mahmud, to Shuja, to whichever prince their *sardar* had chosen — and died in their thousands in a war among the sons of a man their grandfathers had made king. They were the fuel, precisely as the framework says: present at every rupture, indispensable to all of them, author of none.

The accounting of the ending, and what replaced it

The Field Manual's metabolic test asks whether the mass death of a collapse is proportional to how much genuine life-sustaining coordination the order was performing — catastrophic where the order *was* the subsistence system, comparatively light where it was only governance and commerce.

The Durrani order was not a subsistence metabolism. It did not run the irrigation, which was built and maintained locally by *karez*-digging households; it did not run famine relief; it did not run the courts, which were the *qazi*'s under a law the state did not make; it did not run the schools, which were the mullah's. Its coordination was military and fiscal. And accordingly — this is the prediction and it appears to hold — the Kandahar countryside did not starve when the state failed. The Durrani proprietors

who had dispossessed the Parsiwans were themselves farming the land by the 1790s and went on farming it through thirty years of civil war. The dispossession that Module 5 counted as a cost turns out, on the collapse side of the ledger, to have insulated the province from the collapse: the land stayed in cultivation because its new owners lived on it.

The dying was where the fighting was. The Afghan civil wars of 1793–1823 are conventionally given a figure of several hundred thousand dead including civilians; the number circulates without a source this study can trace and should be treated as an impression rather than a count. What can be said with confidence is that the wars ran for thirty years, were fought across the settled country by the contingents of the ruling confederacy, and were accompanied by the loss of every province east of the Indus.

And the successor reloaded the same shape. The Barakzai took the throne from the Sadozai and then immediately fragmented it: Kandahar under one set of brothers, Peshawar under another, Kabul under Dost Muhammad, Herat under a surviving Sadozai. Sardars, appanages, brothers, fratricide. The framework asks whether a rupture installs plurality or reloads the shape under new names, and this one reloaded it exactly — because the settlement, the formation and the default that produced it had none of them been altered. A new clan held the top of an unchanged machine.

Reading the collapse against the framework

The law holds, and the case is a clean instance of it. No group without organised violence changed anything. The crack was at the top, in the royal family and among the clans of the ruling confederacy, and the counter-elite that finally took the throne were the sons of the man who had been the kingmaker two reigns earlier. The framework's four cracks are present in the combination the framework would predict: overproduction as the engine, fracture as the event, and exhaustion — of the revenue base rather than of an army — as the enabling condition.

The refinement this module contributes: date the collapse from the closure of the outlet, not from the founder's death or the first civil war. The Durrani order is conventionally reckoned to have begun failing in 1772 or 1793. Both are too late by a generation. The load-bearing member — the Punjab, functioning at once as revenue, as absorber of surplus claimants, as occupation for the coordinating class, and as the continuous supply of victories that a warrant claiming a direct divine mandate required as evidence — failed between 1764 and 1769, while the founder was alive and still winning battles. **Where a blend of Menu solutions rests on an Export outlet, the order's fate is dated to the outlet's closure, and the interval before the visible**

collapse is the residual life on accumulated capital. Here that interval was about a generation, which may be the general figure.

The second refinement: a floor can become seasonal without cracking, and a seasonal floor loses to a permanent competitor regardless of the balance of force. Ahmad Shah's army was never beaten in the Punjab in a way that decided anything, and he lost the Punjab. What he lost was not battles but the eight months of the year in which he was not there. **The operative measure of a floor is not its strength but its duty cycle, and the test is whether a subject's calculation is dominated by the state's presence or by the interval between its visits.** Where a competitor can occupy the interval, force ratios stop mattering.

And the third, which is the module's main contribution: extraction without governance incubates the successor. The framework holds that a floor may be cracked by conquest from a rival elite. This case shows the rival elite being produced by the order's own arrangements — the unmet demand for protection creating the market, the withheld formation leaving the field, the massacres supplying the martyrology, and the raid supplying the grievance. **Where an order takes a province's surplus without supplying the province's governance, expect a competitor to form inside it; expect that competitor's first business to be protection; and expect the order's suppression of it to accelerate rather than arrest the process.** The tell, seen early, is a protection market. The Durrani had eleven years' warning between the first *rakhi* contracts and the fall of Lahore, and could not have used them, because the money that would have bought the Punjab a government was already committed to exempting Kandahar.

A note on sources. The chronology of the Sikh conquests — Sirhind in January 1764, Lahore in April 1765, Multan in 1772 and definitively in June 1818, Kashmir in July 1819 after Shopian, the Peshawar valley by 1823 — follows the standard histories of the Afghan–Sikh wars, which derive substantially from Ganda Singh and Hari Ram Gupta and are written from inside the Sikh tradition. Battle strengths and casualties in that literature are unreliable and none is relied on here. Ranjit Singh's capture of Lahore in 1799 and his investiture as Maharaja in April 1801 are firm.

The succession sequence after 1772 — Timur's march from Herat, the imprisonment of Sulaiman, the execution of Shah Wali Khan, the military tribunal, the move of the capital, the reduction of Durrani troops, the attempted assessment and the Durrani refusal on the ground that the privileges were hereditary — follows Sajjad Nejatie, *The Pearl of Pearls* (PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 2017), drawing on the *Tarikh-i Ahmad Shahi* and later Durrani sources, and Henry Rawlinson's "Report on the Dooranee Tribes" (c. 1841) for the fiscal reforms. The post-1793

sequence — Zaman Shah's accession with Payandah Khan's backing, Payandah's execution in 1800, the union of his sons, the blinding of Zaman, the reigns of Mahmud and Shuja, the killing of Fateh Khan in 1818 and the Barakzai takeover by 1823 — follows Jonathan L. Lee, *Afghanistan: A History from 1260 to the Present* (2018). Timur Shah's twenty-four sons is the conventional figure and is given as such.

The *rakhi* system and its rate are as described in the preceding modules, from the standard Sikh historiography. The Dal Khalsa's formation on 29 March 1748, the *misl* structure, the division of booty by contributed strength and the *gurmata* at Amritsar are from the same body of work. Qazi Nur Muhammad's observation that the Sikhs had divided the Punjab among themselves and given a share to every man is from his *Jangnama* of 1765, in Ganda Singh's edition, and is paraphrased here.

Contested figures are flagged. The total dead in the Afghan civil wars of 1793–1823 is given in some modern compilations at more than five hundred thousand including civilians; this study has not been able to trace that figure to any source and does not rely on it. The date at which Timur moved the capital to Kabul is given variously between 1773 and 1776. The claim that the Kandahar countryside did not suffer agricultural collapse during the civil wars is an inference from the sedentarisation evidence in Rawlinson and from the absence of any contrary report, not a positive finding, and should be treated as a hypothesis the sources have not been asked to test directly.

MODULE 11

A Crown Made of a Cluster of Wheat

The grim accounting — what the sword took across twenty-five years and the thirty that followed; where the metabolic note was called and where it was not; what the order genuinely built; and how long it took for a handful of grass laid on a robber's turban to become a nation's bestowal

The two ledgers

An armed group took power in the summer of 1747, held it for twenty-five years, and was gone as a ruling dynasty within seventy-five. This module counts what that cost.

It counts in two currencies. The first is the sword: people killed by weapons, in battles, sieges, massacres and executions, and people carried off as property. The second is subtler and does not always apply. A complex order lifts a population above the land's natural carrying capacity, by coordination — irrigation maintained, grain moved, harvests protected, supply lines run. Where an order is doing that, its disruption calls the note in, and the debt is paid in starvation and disease rather than in wounds. The metabolic dead do not appear in any battle account and are frequently the larger number.

So: what did the sword take, and was the note ever called?

What the sword took

The founding, 1747–48. Small numbers, disproportionate consequence. Abd al-Ghani Alakozai killed on the road to Kandahar, on two independent traditions. Nur Muhammad Khan Alizai and Miyan Dad Ishaqzai trampled to death by elephants. Muhabbat Khan, Manu Khan and Gadu Khan imprisoned and never heard of again. Karam Khan Tarini at Pushang and Maqsud Khan Barechi at Shorabak reduced by force. Then Ghazni and Qalat-i Ghilji taken from the Ghilzai; then Kabul, Peshawar and Lahore in the winter of 1747–48; then Manupur on 11 March 1748, described as heavy on both sides with no figures surviving.

Khorasan, 1750–51, 1754–55 and 1769–70. Herat besieged for the best part of a year and taken in late 1750. Mashhad besieged into November 1750 and again in 1754. Nishapur besieged in the winter of 1750–51 and successfully defended, the Afghans withdrawing with something in the order of twelve thousand dead and wounded on

Lee's figure. Nishapur besieged again in 1755, bombarded for a week, stormed, plundered and largely razed — its inhabitants, on one account, spared on condition they took refuge in the mosques and carried nothing out with them.

India, 1748 to 1769. Nine campaigns. Lahore stormed in January 1748 and its notables raising three million rupees to stop the sack. Lahore besieged for four months in 1751–52 with the surrounding country devastated. Delhi sacked in 1757, and Mathura, Vrindavan, Gokul and Agra with it — the killing at the Hindu holy places on the Yamuna being among the episodes most bitterly remembered in Indian tradition. Then the campaigns against the Sikhs, running from 1757 to 1767.

Panipat, 14 January 1761. The largest single day of killing in an eighteenth-century battle anywhere, and the figures are contested in three national directions and must be given as a range.

The Maratha camp before the battle held something between two hundred and fifty and three hundred thousand people, the great majority of them non-combatants — families, pilgrims and camp followers. The Afghans cut the supply lines by late November 1760, and by January the camp was starving, which is why the Marathas came out to fight on the 14th.

On the day, the modern consensus is that between sixty and seventy thousand were killed in the fighting. Kashiraj Pandit, diwan to Shuja-ud-Daula and the closest thing to an eyewitness chronicler, records that about forty thousand Maratha prisoners were killed in cold blood the following day; Grant Duff, interviewing a survivor, broadly corroborated the figure. Sarkar's account has Afghan officers who had lost kin granted a day's permitted vengeance, in which perhaps nine thousand non-combatants were hunted out of the town and killed, and describes victory mounds of severed heads raised outside the camps. T. S. Shejwalkar, whose monograph is generally treated as the best single secondary study, concluded that not less than a hundred thousand Marathas, soldiers and non-combatants together, died during and after the battle.

And roughly twenty-two thousand women and children, many of high rank, were driven off as slaves — Sarkar's figure, from contemporary Indian accounts rather than any count.

The Sikh wars. Amritsar attacked and the tank defiled in 1757; the temple blown up and the tank filled in 1762 and again in 1764. And on 5 and 6 February 1762 at Kup Rahira, the *Vadda Ghallughara*: a column encumbered with families caught by cavalry on a forty-five-mile stretch of road, with estimates of the dead running from about five thousand to as many as fifty thousand, most authorities settling between twenty-five and thirty thousand, and general agreement that the large majority were

women, children and the old. In December 1764 a party recorded at about thirty Sikhs under Baba Gurbakhsh Singh was killed to the last man at Amritsar.

The civil wars, 1793–1823. Thirty years of fighting among Timur Shah's twenty-four sons and the Barakzai brothers, across the settled country, with the contingents of the ruling confederacy on both sides. A figure of more than half a million dead including civilians circulates in modern compilations; this study has not been able to trace it to any source and does not rely on it. What can be said is that the wars ran a generation, were fought where people lived, and ended with the dynasty gone and the empire reduced to Kabul and its surroundings.

Total. No responsible total is possible. A reader who wants an order of magnitude should hold that Panipat alone plausibly killed a hundred thousand, that Kup plausibly killed twenty-five thousand, that the sieges of Herat, Mashhad and Nishapur and the sacks of Lahore, Delhi, Mathura and Agra add tens of thousands more, and that the civil wars are entirely unquantified. The figure is in the hundreds of thousands and it cannot be narrowed.

Who wrote the numbers

Before those figures are used, note whose they are, because the framework's discipline requires it and because in this case the provenance is unusually loaded.

The Panipat figures come from a diwan attached to the *Afghan-allied* camp, from Maratha *bakhars* written by the defeated, from Persian chronicles written for the victors, and from British historians of the nineteenth century compiling all three. The *Ghallughara* figures come from Sikh tradition, which is a martyrology and is meant to be. The Kashmir material comes from a literature that is communal in both directions. The Kandahar land figures come from a register that no longer exists, read by a British political officer in 1841 whose informants sympathised with the dispossessed.

Not one of these numbers is a count. Every one of them was produced by somebody with an interest in its size, and the interests point in opposite directions — victors inflating to magnify a triumph, the defeated inflating to magnify a martyrdom, and both inflating for the same reason, which is that a larger number means more.

And there is the deeper problem the framework names: the powerful leave paper and the powerless leave silence. We have a range for Panipat because two empires and a British historiography cared about it. We have no figure at all for how many Parsiwan cultivators died of the reduction to subsistence in the Arghandab, or how many Kashmiris died on the roads out of the valley, because nobody was counting and nobody has since asked. **The best-documented deaths in this case are the deaths of**

soldiers, and the least documented are the deaths caused by the arrangement working as designed. That is a property of the instrument, not of the history.

The metabolic question

Now the second currency, and the honest answer is that it applies in three places and not in the fourth, which is the interesting one.

Where it does not apply: the Afghan core. The Durrani state was not a subsistence metabolism. It did not build or maintain the irrigation, which was the work of *karez*-digging households and communities; it ran no granaries and no famine relief that the record shows; its courts were the *qazi*'s under a law it did not make and its schools were the mullah's. Its coordination was military and fiscal. So when it failed, the failure did not take the food system with it. The Kandahar countryside went on being farmed through thirty years of civil war, and the reason is the dispossession recorded earlier in this study: by the 1790s the men who owned the land were the men living on it and working it. The transfer that Module 5 counted as a cost to the Parsiwans turns out, on the collapse side, to have insulated the province — because a resident proprietor keeps his channel clear whether or not there is a king in Kabul. **An order whose coordination was never the subsistence system cannot have its metabolic note called, however violent its ending.** This one could not, and did not.

Where it does apply, first: the camp at Panipat. This is the clearest metabolic death in the case and it is usually filed under the battle. A quarter of a million people were concentrated on one spot, sustained entirely by supply lines running back to the Deccan. The Afghans cut those lines in late November 1760. For six weeks the camp starved. The Marathas fought on 14 January because they could no longer feed themselves, and the deaths from hunger and disease inside the camp before a shot was fired are not in the sixty to seventy thousand. **A besieged army is a small civilisation lifted above local carrying capacity by coordination, and cutting its supply is calling the note.** The number is unrecorded and was certainly large.

Where it does apply, second: Kashmir. Here the mechanism is extraction rather than collapse, and it is the clearest instance in the study of a fiscal system doing metabolic damage. The valley was farmed to contractors who had bought their tenure, had no interest in its condition in ten years, and pressed accordingly. On top of the cash demand came *begar* — unpaid forced labour, which takes a man off his own field at exactly the moment his own field needs him, and which therefore reduces next year's harvest as a direct function of this year's exaction. M. A. Kaw, working on the valley's agrarian system, lists the causes of sustained peasant emigration: the rates, the conduct of the state's underlings, the severity of the *begar*, the raids, natural calamities met

without relief, and the fighting among the governors' own officials — leaving the peasantry, in his reading, no course but to leave the valley and wander in search of somewhere better. A cultivator who walks off irrigated ground takes the ground out of production. Sustained emigration from a walled valley with a rich agriculture is a carrying-capacity reduction imposed deliberately, and it is a metabolic cost with no battle attached.

Where it applies, third and least certainly: Khorasan and the Punjab. Nishapur was bombarded, stormed and largely razed in 1755, in a province Nadir had already ruined; and this project has found elsewhere that the irrigation of the Iranian plateau is a *qanat* system whose maintenance is labour-intensive and whose abandonment is close to irreversible. The Punjab was crossed by armies nine times in twenty-two years, foraged repeatedly, and fought over continuously by four or five parties. Both are exactly the conditions under which a metabolic note gets called. But this study has not found the evidence that would establish it — no famine record, no revenue series showing collapse, no account of canals or wells going out. The instrument returns nothing, and the honest report is that the question is the right one and the sources have not answered it.

What the order actually built

The accounting has a credit side and it must be entered at full weight, not as a concession.

It ended a two-hundred-year war. The citadel of Kandahar changed hands roughly ten times between 1522 and 1738 — Arghunid, Mughal, Safavid, Mughal, Safavid, Mughal, Safavid, Ghilzai, Afsharid — with everything that implies for the people living under it: sieges, purges of the previous regime's clients, a new set of tax farmers every generation. After 1747 it was never again ruled from Isfahan or Delhi. Whatever else the Durrani state did, it took a contested march between two empires and made it a centre in its own right, and that is not a small thing for anyone who had to live there.

It kept the peace where it ruled directly. Elphinstone's account of the Durrani country is worth taking at face value because he had no reason to flatter it: no troops permitted to maraud in their lands or in any part of Afghan Khorasan; the general tranquillity secured by the king's government; disputes going before the *jirga* and its decrees supported by the *sardar*; private revenge much repressed by the strength of the government; and blood scarcely ever shed in domestic quarrels among the Durrani. That is a real public good and its beneficiaries were ordinary people.

It built. A new capital from January 1756, with a feeder canal drawn off the Payab from the Arghandab, bringing ground that had previously been unarable into cultivation — to the satisfaction, the court chronicle says, of the local cultivators. New *karez* channels dug across the province and *nawabad* land opened. A land survey. A functioning fiscal bureaucracy of *mustawfis* and *munshis*. A coinage. A shrine and a madrasa. **The carrying capacity of the Durrani heartland went up under this order**, which is the exact opposite of a metabolic debt and belongs on the page beside Kashmir.

And it lifted a population. In 1738 the Abdali were, in the phrase from the register, shepherds ignorant of husbandry, scattered across Khurasan by a conqueror who had broken their leadership and taken hostages of their chiefly families. Within one lifetime their descendants held most of the arable land of a province, free of revenue, heritably, with salaries and a share of an empire. That was done to somebody else, and this study has said at length who. It was still done.

Elphinstone's overall verdict, quoted by Raverty and worth reproducing because it is the strongest defence the case admits: that Ahmad Shah seems to have been naturally disposed to mildness and clemency, and that though it is impossible to acquire sovereign power without crimes, *"the memory of no Eastern Prince is stained with fewer acts of cruelty and injustice."*

Hold that sentence beside forty thousand prisoners killed on the day after Panipat and twenty-five thousand mostly non-combatants at Kup, and do not resolve the tension, because the tension is the finding. Both are true. The mildness was real and it was bounded by the frontier of the settlement, and outside that frontier the same man conducted the largest massacres of the century in that part of the world. A ruler is mild toward the people whose belief he needs.

The accounting in omissions

Where an order is cheap, the framework instructs, count the omissions, because every instrument for measuring harm is built to register commissions and will return a null where the harm is a thing not done.

So: sixty-seven years of Kashmiri revenue, at twenty-four lakhs a year on the one itemised list this study has found — the largest single line in the empire's accounts. What was built in Kashmir with it? Nothing that the record shows. No canal, no road, no granary, no school, no relief in a bad year. The valley's revenue went over the passes to fund the exemption of a province a thousand miles away.

The Punjab, Multan, Sindh, the Deras: the fiscal body of the empire. Works recorded: none.

Formation installed in any of the eastern provinces: none, because admitting them to the settlement was unaffordable.

Schools, hospitals, roads or bridges built anywhere outside the Kandahar country: none that this study has found.

That is the shape of a state that took a flow off a province and returned nothing to it, and the null is an item on the ledger rather than an absence from it. **The parsimony that makes an order look mild in the aggregate is frequently just the accounting of what it declined to do with other people's money.**

The forgetting

Which brings the module to the thing it is really for.

In 1747 a body of cavalry with no legal standing intercepted a treasury convoy in transit, bought a faction of khans with the proceeds, and had a wandering Lahori dervish with no property and no office put a handful of green grass in a man's turban at a fort the last conqueror had built. Within months two of the khans who would not accept the result were trampled to death by elephants and three more disappeared into a prison.

By about 1775 the grants made out of that money — recorded in a military register, assigned by plough-land, with the number of horsemen owed written against them — were being described by their holders as **hereditary**, and the ground on which they refused Timur Shah's assessment was that the privileges were theirs by inheritance *since they were the real source of his power and authority*. One generation. The men saying it had fathers who had watched the register being drawn up.

By 1841 a British political officer copying that same register recorded the arrangement as the established land system of the province, which by then it was.

By 1924, at an assembly in Paghman, King Amanullah could tell the delegates that **the crown made of a cluster of wheat which this nation bestowed upon our dynasty** made his descendants proud. A dervish's improvised handful of grass had become a bestowal by a nation that did not exist in 1747, upon a dynasty, as a crown. Clusters of wheat went onto the state emblems, the banners and the currency of Afghanistan and are there yet.

By 1943 the scene had acquired nine days of deliberation and a young candidate who alone kept silent. By 1949 it was in the grade-twelve textbook. By 2006 the founder's name was in the national anthem.

That is the framework's claim about the naturalisation of a built order, running at unusually observable speed, with dates. And the discipline the project holds requires the next sentence, which is that **none of this makes the belief false or the believers**

dupes. The Durrani proprietor of 1775 who told Timur Shah's assessors that his tenure was hereditary was not lying and was not deceived; he had been born into a world in which it was hereditary, his father's standing rested on it, and the register was a piece of paper in an office he had never seen. His conviction was as real as any conviction gets. It was simply younger than he thought.

What the accounting adds is only this: that the arrangement he believed in had a price, that the price was paid by Parsiwan cultivators, Kashmiri peasants, Punjabi villagers, Maratha prisoners and Sikh families on a road near Malerkotla, and that by the time the belief had fully taken, nobody inside it had any occasion to know.

Reading the accounting against the framework

The metabolic test returns a split verdict, and the split is informative. The framework holds that the mass death a collapse collects is proportional to how much genuine, life-sustaining coordination the order was performing. This order performed almost none, and accordingly its collapse — thirty years of civil war across the settled country — did not produce a famine in the Afghan core. But the same test applied to the order *while it stood* returns a different answer, and the case suggests a refinement worth stating:

Metabolic damage is not only a collapse phenomenon. An extractive order can call the note in a province while it is still functioning perfectly, by taking labour rather than produce. The Kashmiri *begar* is the mechanism: a levy paid in a cultivator's time, extracted at the season when his time is what the harvest depends on, so that the exaction reduces next year's output as a matter of arithmetic. A tax in grain takes a share of what is grown. A tax in labour reduces what can be grown. **Look for corvée where a province's population is emigrating, and read the emigration as the carrying capacity being lowered rather than merely as flight from a rate.**

And a second, on the direction of metabolic effects. This order raised the carrying capacity of its core — canals, *karez*, *nawabad* — in the same decades in which it lowered the carrying capacity of Kashmir. Those are not two policies; they are one, funded from the second to build the first. **Where an order is running a split floor, expect the metabolic ledger to split with it, and total the two before pronouncing on whether the order was constructive.** An empire can be a builder and a wrecker simultaneously and in exact proportion, and an accounting that visits only the capital will report a public benefactor.

On the forgetting, the case supplies a rate. The framework holds that a built arrangement becomes the furniture of reality across generations of formation. Here the interval is measurable at every stage: about thirty years from register to asserted

inheritance; about ninety from a dervish's handful of grass to a monarch describing it as a nation's bestowal; about two hundred to a national anthem. **The first stage is the fast one and it is a single generation** — because it requires only that the people who saw the thing made should die, and that their children should have been born into it. Everything after is elaboration.

A note on sources. Casualty figures are given as ranges and none is a count. Panipat: sixty to seventy thousand killed in the fighting is the modern consensus; about forty thousand prisoners killed the following day is from the *bakhar* of Kashiraj Pandit, diwan to Shuja-ud-Daula and present in the Afghan-allied camp, broadly corroborated by James Grant Duff's interview with a survivor; the day of permitted vengeance in which perhaps nine thousand non-combatants were killed, and the mounds of severed heads, are from Jadunath Sarkar's *Fall of the Mughal Empire*; "not less than 100,000 Marathas, soldiers and non-combatants" is T. S. Shejwalkar's conclusion in *Panipat 1761*; the Maratha camp at two hundred and fifty to three hundred thousand, mostly non-combatants, and the cutting of supplies in late November 1760, are from the standard accounts; the roughly twenty-two thousand women and children taken as slaves is Sarkar's estimate from contemporary Indian accounts. The *Vadda Ghallughara* of 5–6 February 1762 is estimated across the literature at between about five thousand and fifty thousand dead, most authorities between twenty-five and thirty thousand, with agreement that the large majority were non-combatants; the figures derive from Sikh tradition and no contemporary count exists. The twelve thousand Afghan dead and wounded in the withdrawal from Nishapur in the winter of 1750–51 follows Jonathan L. Lee. The half-million dead attributed to the Afghan civil wars of 1793–1823 in some modern compilations is untraceable and is not relied on.

Mountstuart Elphinstone's *An Account of the Kingdom of Caubul* (1815; 1839 edition) is public domain and supplies the description of the Durrani country under the monarchy and the verdict on Ahmad Shah's character, the latter quoted here as reproduced by Henry Raverty in *Selections from the Poetry of the Afghans* (1862), also public domain.

Henry Rawlinson's "Report on the Dooranee Tribes" (c. 1841) supplies the land settlement and the description of the Durrani in 1747 as shepherds ignorant of husbandry; it rests on records now lost and its proportions are estimates. Sajjad Nejatie's *The Pearl of Pearls* (PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 2017) supplies the construction of Ahmadshahi from 3 January 1756 with the Payab canal and the reclamation of unarable land from the *Tarikh-i Ahmad Shahi*, and Timur Shah's attempted assessment with the Durrani reply that the privileges were hereditary. M. A. Kaw's work on the agrarian system of Kashmir supplies the causes of peasant

emigration including the severity of *begar*. M. Jamil Hanifi, "Editing the Past," *Iranian Studies* 37, no. 2 (2004), supplies Amanullah's statement to the 1924 assembly about the crown of wheat bestowed by the nation, from the published proceedings of that assembly, and the subsequent appearance of the wheat cluster on Afghan state emblems.

The suggestion that repeated campaigning damaged the agriculture of the Punjab and Khorasan structurally is raised in this module and not established; no famine record, revenue series or account of irrigation failure has been found to support it, and it is left as an open question rather than a finding.

MODULE 12

Two Answers to One Night

Convergence and divergence — the control case restated, the corpus corrected, the same instrument compared where it produced the opposite result; what this case contributes; and the strongest argument against everything in it, given at full strength and answered

The control

This case exists in the collection because of an accident of geography on one night. On 19–20 June 1747, at Fathabad in Khorasan, two men were in the same camp when Nadir Shah was murdered in his tent. One of them was the murdered man's nephew, Ali Quli Khan, who took the throne as Adil Shah within a fortnight and lost it within a year. The other was a hostage's son with a middling rank and a post guarding the royal harem, who rode east with three or four thousand Afghan cavalry and founded a state whose ruling confederation held its core country into the twentieth century.

Same year, same army, same training, same collapsing region between two dying empires, same problem: a soldier of no royal blood trying to convert possession into ownership. That protection against the objection that the century was simply ungovernable is the reason this collection reached for the case, and it holds. The material was not the explanation. Something else was.

But the collection had the something else partly wrong, and this study's first duty is to say so.

What the corpus had wrong

The reading this collection has been carrying rested on a scene: a nine-day deliberation at Kandahar among rival candidates, in which a young man younger than several of them did not campaign for himself, kept silent, and was named at the end by a religious figure — the whole read as a warlord submitting himself to a body he did not control, at real risk of not being chosen, and thereby acquiring a title no amount of force could have produced. Nadir, on the same account, had an assembly available at Mughan and made it an acclamation, and that unwillingness to risk an answer was his political problem in its final form.

The eighteenth-century record does not support that scene.

The nine days and the silence enter the literature in 1943, in a nationalist biography published under the Afghan monarchy and awarded a state prize, and pass from there into the grade-twelve schoolbook of 1949 and thence into general circulation in English. Behind that biography stands a nineteenth-century chronicle written by a member of the dynasty that had overthrown Ahmad Shah's line, which contains a demonstrable anachronism and an obvious interest. Behind that stand European reconstructions of Persian chronicles that none of the reconstructors had read closely.

What the contemporary court chronicle actually contains is an assembly of khans at Kandahar imploring a reluctant Ahmad to take a throne described as his by inheritance, and a wandering dervish from Lahore fixing a tuft of green grass to his turban in place of a royal plume. What other eighteenth-century sources contain is a choice made *on the road* before Kandahar; a rival killed en route to preserve unity; a conditional consent that reserved the right to replace him; and, within months, two chiefs trampled to death by elephants and three more disappeared into a prison. And underneath all of it, an intercepted treasury convoy whose proceeds were distributed as titles, robes of honour and cash to secure a core faction.

So the claim that the outcome was genuinely in doubt cannot stand, and the nine days must be withdrawn from the collection's evidentiary base.

What survives, and what replaces it

The comparison survives. It has to be restated on three axes instead of one, and the restatement is stronger than the thing it replaces.

First, on the warrant. Ahmad Khan could not put the grass in his own turban. It had to be done by someone whose standing he had not conferred and could not manufacture, and the man who did it owned nothing, held no office, belonged to no tribe in Kandahar, and was not from the country. That is what made the gesture worth anything. Nadir at Mughan produced an assembly of men who all held their positions of him, and got from it exactly what such an assembly can give, which is nothing. **The operative variable is not whether the claimant risked losing; it is whether the conferrer had anything to lose by refusing.** Sabir Shah did not. A khan whose land came from Nadir did. Stated generally, and offered to replace the older formulation: *a warrant is worth the independence of whoever confers it, and the surest sign of independence is that the conferrer has nothing the claimant could have given him.* Watch, in any accession, for the propertyless sanctifier, and discount the warrant by every acre and office in the investing hand.

Second, on the disposal. The collection's existing reading here was correct and this study confirms it. Nadir's Indian plunder went to a fortress at Kalat, behind a guard of

his best troops, and was still there, largely untouched, while his collectors drove cultivators off the land. Ahmad Shah's intercepted convoy went outward within weeks, into the hands of the men whose loyalty he required, and every subsequent campaign's yield followed it. One man hoarded and one distributed, and the difference is most of the difference in outcome.

Third — and this is new — on the treatment of the core. Nadir taxed his heartland to destruction. Ahmad Shah exempted his entirely. This study can now put a number on the second half: the itemised revenue list of the Durrani provinces gives Kandahar at two lakhs, against Kashmir at twenty-four, in an empire whose Durrani cavalry drew a cash salary bill many times the whole revenue of the capital province. **These are opposite answers to one problem — a payroll larger than the domestic revenue — and the Durrani answer was to bill somebody else.**

Same instrument, opposite result

The sharpest comparisons in the collection are not with Nadir but with two orders that used the identical instrument and got the opposite outcome, because that is where the operative variable shows.

The Durrani settlement granted land free of revenue in exchange for armed service — one horseman for every plough. That is the medieval European tenurial bargain exactly, and it carries the same defect in the same clause: a grant purchasing armed service leaves the grantee with a retinue, so that the king's army is the sum of his nobles' contingents and can at any moment become the army that removes him. The Norman settlement of England installed that risk and the whole political history of baronial revolt is the defect coming due. The Durrani installed it and the first conspiracy was under way within months of the accession; the wazir claimed the throne in verse within seventeen years; the succession was contested by force in 1772; and thirty years of civil war followed 1793.

Brandenburg-Prussia ran the same bargain and produced a servant of the crown. The Hohenzollerns bought the Junker with land and office and got, in return, not merely his cavalry but his *obedience*, because the crown captured his local authority over his villagers and converted it into a function of the state — the lord's power over the peasant and the king's ability to send the soldier home for nine months of the year being, in that arrangement, the same fact.

The Durrani crown captured nothing of the kind. The sardar's authority over his clansmen was not a royal grant and could not be redirected: it came from descent, was renewed in every generation by a formation the crown neither built nor ran, and defeated royal appointments whenever the two collided. A chief the king put in from

outside the head family was obeyed with reluctance while the clan waited for a rebellion under a Sadozai to be rid of him.

So the variable in the co-optation family is not the grant and not even the consideration. It is whether the crown acquires the grantee's local authority or leaves it standing. Where it acquires it, the grant makes a servant. Where it leaves it, the grant makes a rival with an income. Prussia and the Durrani ran the same instrument on opposite sides of that line and got a bureaucratic monarchy and a thirty-year fratricide respectively.

The three clauses

And the comparison with the Ottomans supplies the other half, because they were solving the same problem by the opposite method and their machinery names precisely what the Durrani lacked.

Ottoman prevention rested on three anti-hereditary mechanisms: recruitment of the martial and administrative core from outside the population that could supply a rival class; revenue grants that reverted to the state on the holder's death; and confiscation of a servant's fortune at his death or disgrace. Those three clauses held the arrangement for roughly two centuries before corroding into the hereditary class the machine had been built to prevent.

The Durrani *tiyul* had none of them. No reversion on death. No requirement of residence. No bar on transfer — Elphinstone noticed the absence and remarked on it, contrasting the Durrani arrangement with the Habsburg military frontier, which forbade transfer and provided for the actual service of the holder's sons. And instead of confiscation, the *khushk-aba* were converted to *mawrusi*, hereditary in law, on a manufactured ancestral title.

Two centuries against thirty years. The Ottoman machine corroded; the Durrani settlement was hereditary in practice within a generation and was being asserted as hereditary by right in the reign of the founder's son. That is not a difference of political skill. It is the difference three clauses make, and this case supplies the control that shows what happens when a co-optation is written without them.

Ahmad Shah did run a prevention solution — a household corps of foreigners with no local base, larger in establishment than the Durrani contingent owed. But he ran it *alongside* the Co-opt settlement rather than instead of it, and a prevention corps inside a hereditary settlement is a counterweight, not a solution. It kept the crown alive. It did not stop the settlement hardening.

The successor

There is one further comparison and it is the most instructive, because the counter-case is not a distant analogue but the order that took this one's revenue base.

The Sikh polity that emerged in the Punjab was founded on a different anchor entirely: not a lineage, not a dervish, not a coin claiming a direct command from God, but an initiation with a conduct code, a founder narrative, a sacred centre and an assembly that bound the whole body. It began with a base far wider than any Durrani institution — Jats, artisans and low-caste men admitted on equal terms and given one name. It acquired sardars, contingents, a revenue system and territory between 1748 and 1765. And it took Sirhind, Lahore, Multan, Kashmir and finally Peshawar.

Set the two side by side and the divergence is legible in the terms this study has built. The Durrani order withheld formation from the province it taxed, because forming it would have meant admitting it to a settlement of fixed size. The Khalsa's whole method was admission. The Durrani floor was seasonal, present four months of the year; the *misls* were there in the eight. The Durrani sold nothing to a Punjabi cultivator; the Dal Khalsa sold protection at a published rate. And when the Durrani attacked the rival's formative centre — three times — they supplied it with exactly the martyrdom that a sacred-value formation converts into cohesion.

The order that could not afford to admit anybody was displaced by an order whose founding act was admission, in the province where the first had refused to govern. That is the study's comparison and it needs no further gloss.

The contribution

Across twelve modules one configuration has been assembling itself, and it is offered as this case's addition to the collection. Call it the **export-funded settlement**, and it runs as a chain in which each link is forced by the one before.

One. The population that supplies the floor is armed and mobile and can disperse — pastoralists with movable wealth and highlands to withdraw into. A floor cannot price the defection of people it cannot reach.

Two. Therefore the apex must *buy* their compliance rather than compel it. Exemption from revenue, land held free, pay on campaign, a share of plunder.

Three. Therefore the purchase must be funded from a population that *can* be compelled — irrigators who cannot carry their channels away, and provinces beyond the frontier. The exemption of the core and the over-extraction of the periphery are one transaction, and the revenue list shows the money physically arriving in one place and being spent in another.

Four. Therefore the order must raid, whatever its ruler intends, because the gap between its establishment charge and its domestic revenue is too large to close at any tax rate. Two lakhs from Kandahar against sixteen in cavalry salaries is a state that must raid. Nine invasions in twenty-two years is not nine decisions; it is a payment schedule.

Five. The raid does four jobs at once — pays the subsidies, absorbs the surplus claimants, occupies the coordinating class, and renews a warrant that can only be evidenced by victory — so four Menu solutions come to rest on one outlet.

Six. But an order that raids a province without governing it *incubates its successor there*: the unmet demand for protection creates a market, the withheld formation leaves the field to whatever is already running, and the violence used to suppress the result becomes the material the result is made of.

Seven. When the successor matures, the outlet closes, and all four solutions fail simultaneously. The interval between the outlet's closure and the visible collapse is the order's residual life on accumulated capital — here about a generation.

The diagnostic value is that this chain can be read forward from the balance sheet. **An order whose capital province cannot pay its own garrison is an export-funded settlement whatever it calls itself, and the questions to ask next are where the money comes from, whether that province is governed or only billed, and whether a protection market has appeared in it.** The protection market is the early tell; the Durrani had eleven years between the first *rakhi* contracts and the fall of Lahore, and could not have used them, because the money that would have bought the Punjab a government was already committed to exempting Kandahar.

The refinements banked

Nine smaller findings compounded on the way and are set down for the next case to test.

On sightlines. A conqueror inherits his horizon with the apparatus he captures. Ahmad Shah expanded precisely along the axes the Safavid–Mughal–Nadirid chanceries had been built to watch, and was destroyed by two powers those chanceries had no file on. Expect a successor state's reach to track the sightlines of the apparatus it took, and expect what kills it to grow in that apparatus's blind spots.

On the recursion. The layers of prior conquest reach the self-running pole at very different depths, and the layer that looks most primordial may be the one whose construction is best documented — here a tribal chieftaincy that was a Safavid administrative grant of 1622, set against an Islam eight centuries deep that left no trace of imposition. Rank the layers by depth before predicting which a conqueror uses free and which he must buy or break.

On the settlement. Ask the default question twice, once of the arrangement and once of the occupant. An order can be extremely stable and its rulers extremely disposable, and the gap is where the succession wars live. And a settlement can be non-heritable in its instrument and heritable in its *silences* — look for the absent clauses on reversion, residence and transfer, not the granting one.

On the robe. An anchor can be acquired without being captured. The object transfers; the interpretive authority does not, because it is not part of the object. Expect a division rather than a capture — the clergy keeping custody, the crown keeping display — and expect the division to outlast both parties' original claims.

On formation. Force applied to a formation is an input, not a solvent. Only a competing formation dissolves one, and that requires admitting people. Where a ruler cannot afford to admit them, every coercive measure raises the formation's value to its holders, and the tell is a rising body-count against rising rather than falling cohesion.

On the cost column. Price the sovereign's product, not only his demand. Where a state's periodic presence is net-destructive of the security it nominally sells, the constraint is not the revolt threshold but the price of the best alternative protector, and the tell is a market rather than a rebellion.

On extraction. Name the raid as a third mode beside the rate and the dispossession: it takes a stock from a population left in place, has no equilibrium because there is no ongoing relationship, and repeats on an interval set by the raider's fiscal need rather than by anything in the victim's country.

On liberty. Distinguish an immunity from a channel. Factional bargaining reliably produces the first — cheap to grant, self-enforcing, negative and local — and never the second, because a channel is a standing capacity to be told no. An order can accumulate immunities for centuries and end no nearer a constitution, and the accumulation makes the eventual crisis worse by furnishing an armed class with a sense of violated right.

On the record. Check which chronicle propagated, not which came first. The founding chronicler here was commissioned, vetted and excellent, and lost to the chronicle of the dynasty that overthrew his patron's line. A founding narrative belongs to whoever held the presses two centuries later, and that is characteristically not the founder's heirs.

The counter-position

Now the strongest case against everything above, stated as its holders would state it and not as a straw figure.

This study has spent twelve modules describing one of the most successful state-foundings in modern Asian history as though it were an accounting fraud.

Consider what actually happened. In 1747 the country between Persia and India was a march that had changed hands ten times in two centuries, whose people had been conquered, deported, taken hostage and conscripted by whichever empire held the citadel that decade. Within twenty-five years there was a state there. It was ruled from a city its own king built, in its own name, by a dynasty of its own people, and it was never again governed from Isfahan or Delhi. The Safavids are gone. The Afsharids lasted eleven years. The Mughals became a pension. The Marathas were broken at Panipat and finished by the British. The Sikh state lasted fifty years and was annexed. The British left. Afghanistan is still there, and its shape is recognisably the shape Ahmad Shah's core had in 1760. Judge a founder by which of his works survived, and this one outlasted every rival, every neighbour and every empire that came to take it.

Second: the study prices the settlement as a purchase and calls the exemption a bribe. But look at what the transaction actually was. In 1738 the Abdali were a scattered pastoral people whose leaders had been broken by a conqueror, whose chiefly families were held hostage, and who had been deported across Khurasan in lots. Within one lifetime their descendants owned most of the arable land of a province, held it heritably, paid nothing on it, drew salaries, sat in the great offices of an empire, and had a king of their own blood who could not appoint a chief over them without their consent. That is not a bribe. That is a people acquiring a stake in its own country, and describing it in the vocabulary of procurement is a category error that mistakes the outside of a thing for the thing.

Third: the comparison is rigged. The study measures the Durrani record in the Punjab against a standard of governance no state in eighteenth-century northern India met. The Mughals had not governed the Punjab; they had farmed it and lost it. The Marathas took chauth by raid, which is the same instrument. The Sikhs' rakhi was protection money before it was a state, as the study concedes. Everyone in that country was doing what Ahmad Shah was doing. Faulting him for it is not analysis; it is anachronism wearing a framework.

Fourth: the violence. Panipat was appalling and so was Kup. But Nadir killed more in Delhi in a single day, the Marathas had spent thirty years extracting by cavalry raid across northern India, and the standards being applied here would convict every ruler on the subcontinent in that century. To itemise one man's massacres while treating the surrounding practice as background is to moralise about a particular while excusing the general.

And fifth, which is the real objection and the one the other four are built on. This study has explained a Muslim king's state entirely in a cold vocabulary of purchase, extraction, warrants and management, and has thereby made unavailable the only thing that was actually true for the people living in it. Ahmad Shah was a serious Sufi who wrote a treatise on gnosis for other Sufis and lyric poetry with no politics in it. He took initiation with a village pir and appointed one his grand wazir. His subjects believed what he believed, had believed it for eight hundred years, and understood him as a Muslim king ruling under a law that came from God. The framework's answer to all of that is to concede that the belief was real and then carry on counting. But a description that can see the coin and the register and the salary bill, and cannot see the thing the coin was about, has not explained the order. It has produced a very careful anatomy of a skeleton and called it the animal.

The answer

The first four can be answered. The fifth requires a concession.

On survival. The order did last and the state is there and this study has said so at full weight — the two-hundred-year war ended, the peace kept in the core, the canal dug, the *nawabad* opened, a scattered people made proprietors in a lifetime. But durability is a fact about incentive structure and not a verdict. The Durrani core survived because the men in it were paid, because their formation renewed itself every generation without the crown's help, and because the country was poor and hard and nobody with the means to take it wanted it enough. That is a good explanation of why it lasted and it is not a justification of anything. *It survived, therefore it was right* is a syllogism this collection refuses on principle, and it must refuse it here in the case's favour exactly as readily as it refuses it elsewhere against.

On the stake. The concession is real and has been made throughout: the Durrani householder was neither a dupe nor a victim, and what happened to him between 1738 and 1772 was a genuine transformation. But a stake is a share of something, and what he acquired a share of was the land of the Parsiwan cultivators of the Arghandab, who were reduced across the same decades to labouring on it for a third to a half of produce and left with just enough to live on. The two facts are one transaction. To describe the acquisition without the dispossession is not warmer; it is shorter.

On the rigged comparison. It is quite true that no state in that region governed the Punjab. But the alternative this study measures against is not an anachronistic ideal; it is in the record, and it is what the *misls* did, which was to appear in a village, name a rate, and turn up when raiders came. That was available in 1753, it cost a fifth of the revenue, and the Punjabis chose it over the Durrani. The foreclosed alternative is not

the analyst's invention. It is what the people who had to choose actually chose, and the Durrani lost the province to it.

On the violence. Nothing in this study claims the practice was peculiar to Ahmad Shah, and the module that counted the dead said explicitly that the numbers come from partisans in three national directions and that the best-documented deaths are soldiers' while the worst-documented are those the arrangement caused by working normally. The point of counting is not to convict one man against a background of others. It is that an accounting which counts only the winners' achievements and not their bills is not an accounting.

And on the fifth. Here the objection lands, and the honest response is to grant most of it and then say what is left.

It is granted that the belief was real, that Ahmad Shah held it, that his subjects held it, and that a man in Kandahar in 1770 did not experience himself as living inside an arrangement. This study has insisted on that at every point where it mattered: that the *Rukn al-yaqin* is not a document produced by someone managing an impression; that the Durrani proprietor of 1775 who called his tenure hereditary was neither lying nor deceived, only younger than the thing he believed in; that a built order which became real is more genuine and more durable than a lie; and that naming a conquered origin is not debunking. A framework that could only see the arithmetic would indeed have described a skeleton.

What is left is the question the belief's own vocabulary has no way to ask, and it is a short one: *who paid.* Inside the order, in the fullest sincerity, there was no occasion to ask it, because the people who paid were Parsiwans and Kashmiris and Punjabis and captives, and none of them was inside. That is not a defect in the believers. It is a fact about where they were standing, and this collection's whole method is that a position fixes what a person can see before it fixes anything else. The framework's contribution is not a better account of what it was like to be an eighteenth-century Kandahari, which the poetry does far better. It is the one question the poetry could not have been expected to contain, asked from a vantage no contemporary occupied — and asked, it should be said, by someone whose own late and privileged position hands him the whole board with the outcomes known, which no one at Fathabad ever had.

Legibility is not pardon. It is also not debunking. It is the attempt to hold, in one description, a man who wrote *flee thou thy God unto* and a man who had two chiefs trampled by elephants in the same year, without letting either fact dissolve the other — and to state plainly that the exemption which made a shepherd's grandson a landowner in Kandahar was the same instrument as the *begar* that drove a cultivator out of the Kashmir valley, because the money moved in one direction along one road.

Both are true. Refusing to let either cancel the other is not fence-sitting. It is the only position from which the thing can be seen clearly enough to be argued with.

A note on sources. This module rests on the eleven preceding it and adds no new primary material; the sources for every factual claim are given where the claim was first established. The comparisons are to studies elsewhere in this collection — the Afsharid case for Nadir, the Norman settlement for the grant purchasing armed service, Brandenburg-Prussia for the same grant producing a servant of the crown, and the Ottoman classical age for the three anti-hereditary clauses — and the reader should consult those for their own evidence and their own qualifications rather than take the compressed versions here as sufficient. Mountstuart Elphinstone's observation that the Durrani government, unlike the Habsburg military frontier, required no residence and forbade no transfer is from *An Account of the Kingdom of Caubul* (1815; 1839 edition) and is public domain. The withdrawal of the nine-day *jirga* from the collection's evidentiary base follows M. Jamil Hanifi, "Editing the Past," *Iranian Studies* 37, no. 2 (2004), corroborated on the source-critical points by Sajjad Nejatie, *The Pearl of Pearls* (PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 2017), and is treated at length in the landscape and in the first module.

The counter-position stated above is this study's own construction of the strongest available case against its reading, drawing on Afghan nationalist historiography, on the standard defence of eighteenth-century state-founders against anachronistic judgement, and on the general objection that a structural vocabulary cannot capture a religious life. No individual scholar is being paraphrased and none should be held responsible for it. Readers who want the case for Ahmad Shah made by someone who believes it should go to Ganda Singh's *Ahmad Shah Durrani: Father of Modern Afghanistan* (1959), which remains the standard biography and is warmer toward its subject than anything here, and to Mir Ghulam Muhammad Ghubar's *Ahmad Shah Baba-ye Afghan* (Kabul, 1943), which is the founding text of the Afghan national reading and which this study has spent a good deal of effort disagreeing with.